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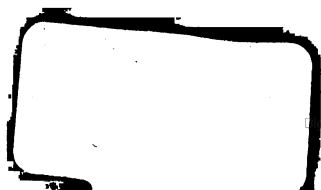
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## **JOANNA BUILDS A NEST**



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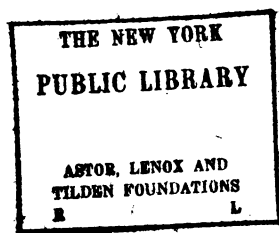
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She dropped down among his cushions and tried to let her message reach him without words. The breath of the crushed bracken under her rug, the murmur of the brook at her feet, would carry it to him better than speech could.

# JOANNA BUILDS A NEST

By  
JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

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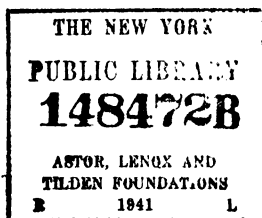


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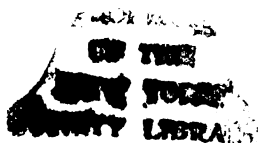
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*Printed in the United States of America*



PRESS OF  
BRAUNWORTH & CO.  
BOOK MANUFACTURERS  
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

OCT 1<sup>st</sup> 1920

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## CONTENTS

| CHAPTER                        | PAGE |
|--------------------------------|------|
| I A LITTLE BROWN HOUSE . .     | 11   |
| II A SLIGHTLY DISABLED SOLDIER | 53   |
| III A WORKING HOUSEKEEPER .    | 92   |
| IV JONES . . . . .             | 138  |
| V THE TEMPERAMENTAL HELP .     | 176  |
| VI THE MATE . . . . .          | 225  |
| VII THE NEST . . . . .         | 252  |



# **JOANNA BUILDS A NEST**





# JOANNA BUILDS A NEST

## CHAPTER I

### A LITTLE BROWN HOUSE

ONE person stopped to watch, and then another, and gradually the whole street came to a halt, forming a big still ring, in the middle of which a very small sparrow wrestled with an engineering problem. Before her lay a long, soft, gray-white feather from one of the superior feather dusters of that neighborhood, a distinguished finish for the nest in the tree above; the problem was to get it up there.

A dozen trial trips failed. The feather was too long, too heavy. It

always fell back. Muscular spectators, aching to lend a hand, had to stand by helpless. The sparrow fussed, coaxed, scolded, tried it by the middle, by either end; then, mothered by necessity, she grew ingenious, took the quill in her beak, edged a tiny shoulder under the shaft so that it ran down her back, set her little wings to beating, and so rose, slowly, steadily, with her long plume floating out behind. No one stirred until she had it safe up in the greenery; then there was a burst of laughter, everybody looked at his neighbor with warmly lit eyes, and the street went on about its business.

Joanna Maynard's nest-building had the same gallant, touching, absurd appeal. She was always at it.

The many interests of her erratic big being were overtopped and dominated by the home passion. From the time she was five years old, she was nesting—under the weeping elm, under the valance of the guest-room bed, under anything that would sketch ceiling and walls to house her dream. At ten she found her first settled habitation in a disused woodshed and hopped in and out with her straws and feathers all one ecstatic spring, weaving her little miracle of home.

“The child is ingenious,” her father said, seeing where the buffers that kept the doors from banging the walls had gone. Joanna, unscrewing them from the mopboard, had screwed them neatly into the bottom

of her box-bureau, making four charming little legs beneath a dotted muslin petticoat that had yesterday been the bathroom sash curtain.

"I hope she will be a better house-keeper than I am," her mother said absently and went back to the speech she was preparing on *The New Woman*, then a daringly advanced theme. Perhaps Mr. Maynard, hunting patiently and perennially for clothes brush, blacking brush, hearth brush, wished so too, but a man who has not been financially successful may not say much at home.

Later, Joanna's room at college kept her awake at night and adream in class with its haunting possibilities. The science of decoration meant nothing to her, period left her

## A LITTLE BROWN HOUSE

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cold; but she wanted to create pleasantness and comfort at small expense as the musician wants to create music—as the sparrow wants to build her nest. The desire was a song in the heart, a fever in the blood.

A north hall bedroom in a boarding-house, white and gold, clean and cold, daunted even Joanna's creative powers, and so when she had survived her first breathless year at the office and found solid ground under her feet and had her salary raised, she began her historic movings. There was the Sixth Avenue loft, cheap because it had been condemned by the fire board, full of alluring shadows and corners, but eventually proving impossible by reason of some drunken creature eternally asleep on its unde-

fended stairs. There was the room with the lace-work iron balcony, rich in homely charm, but already, alas, over-populated. There was the unheated top floor just off Washington Square—with the coal four flights down. There was half the delightful upper west-side apartment of the fragile lady who described herself as a widow—she wore high blonde boots scalloped with black, and her first name was Pearl, and even Joanna ought to have known on sight. Then, as she prospered, came experiments in studios with kitchenettes, and Joanna worked over them nights with her tools and paints and stencils and her joyous invention, until she made them so charming that the landlord raised the rent out of her reach,

and she had to start all over again. She was like the historic beaver which, shut in a gentleman's library, proceeded to build a dam out of books. She could not be stopped.

And now at last she had begun on the real nest, the final one, the home that was to be worthy of her gift. The land was hers and could not be sold from beneath her. The old house on it, inalienably hers, offered her, between a gabled roof and a stone cellar, the clear canvas of two unexplored floors — for Joanna, somewhat characteristically, had bought it furnished without having been inside.

“But I could see a little through the shutters,” she explained patiently to the Howard Messengers. “I saw



the corner of a nice old octagon dining table, and a fireplace that wasn't blacked outside, so the chimney doesn't smoke—I really thought of things. We got into the cellar, you remember, and that was all right."

The Howard Messengers still looked uneasy, for a Sunday with them had done the deed. They had suggested that Joanna buy the adjoining place as they might have said, "Suppose we all go out to India together," knowing perfectly well that they would do nothing of the sort. They did not yet thoroughly know Joanna. They had strolled down from their higher acres to inspect the house and Joanna, coming suddenly on it at the turn of the lane, had stood like a stag at gaze.

## A LITTLE BROWN HOUSE

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What the Messengers saw was a gracious green slope set with apple trees; a little old brown wooden house, its pointed gables hung with Hamburg edging, settled down in the grass with an air of brooding comfort; old lilacs half strangled by runaway grape-vines; a border of woodland, birch and beech, musical with the sound of running water; great folds of hills on all sides, and in the valley just below white glimpses of houses. Mrs. Messenger also saw the practical advantages of being near the village and yet within comfortable distance of the summer colony scattered through the hills beyond; and Howard saw a probable rise in the value of the land. But what Joanna saw when her eyes

fixed like that no one could ever really know. Probably it was something between heaven and fairy-land, lit by love at first sight.

Joanna had not seemed especially concerned at their failure to force an entrance. She had sat about in staring reverie while they pried at the windows and tried Howard's keys on the doors. When they finally forced a way into the cellar, they had to hunt her up, and found her standing over the brook, smiling at it with the tender indulgence of a mother who watches her child at play.

"I will call the place Water Brooks," she said.

"Water—Brooks;" Howard tried it dubiously. "Isn't that what they call tautology? What else could a brook be but water?"

“There is only one brook on the place and it dries up in August,” Rosalind added.

Joanna was undisturbed. “‘As the hart panteth after the water brooks,’” she murmured. “Only I always think it ‘heart.’ That is the loveliest line in the whole world.”

“Oh, of course—Bible,” said Howard. “Well, the foundations seem to be all right.”

“I wish you could do it,” said Rosalind.

Joanna had not said much about it that evening, and no one knew that she lay gloriously awake all night and was out in the soaking dew at sunrise staring absorbedly. She took the early train back to town, and occasionally after that she spoke of “my house.” She had a few thousand

dollars, left to her by her mother's writings, and respectfully named by the Messengers her Capital. One did not lightly disturb Capital. And the news that she had put her capital into an uninspected house two hours by train from her work did not call out the enthusiasm that she expected.

"But I wasn't out there again," she explained, as if that were reason enough. "And the place has haunted me all winter. I couldn't get it out of my head. I woke up last Monday morning in a panic lest some one would snap it up, so I bought it on my way to the office. And I have been glad every single minute since," she added, as though that justified anything. Joanna took no more interest in philosophy than she did in

decoration, but she had an inborn, un-analyzed, all-dominating belief in happiness. Fortunately, the happiness of the other person was included—happiness for every one. She was big, handsome in a rough-cut, dark-shadowed fashion, with a wide, beautiful, thoughtful brow handed down from her mother, and absent, near-sighted olive gray eyes from her father, and an air of amused goodwill that might have meant blunders. No one had dreamed that she would be especially useful at the office—she had been given a chance for her mother's sake. But now, ten years later, it was well known that the house could not possibly run without her. She was not so strong on routine, perhaps, but for difficulties she

had always a priceless suggestion; and difficulties are many in the publishing business. Her instinct for a best-seller amounted to divination.

"I will run you out to see it," Rosalind Messenger said. "Only if we go on Sunday I shall have to bring Howard." She was quite simply apologetic about it, and Joanna was as simply reassuring:

"Oh, I should like to have him. I am very fond of Howard." Joanna's mother, shaking the world with her portrayal of *The New Woman*, had never uttered doctrine half so revolutionary as that matter of course exchange, but neither noticed anything momentous.

"He is nice," Howard's wife disposed of him, and they turned back

to their absorbing affairs. Rosalind picked up dilapidated houses on long leases, put into them a little money and a great deal of taste, and rented them for enormous sums; and it was this that had brought her and Joanna together. Joanna's inspirations for charm and economy were proving invaluable. Howard ran his real-estate business faithfully, doggedly, but he did not have inspirations.

"I suppose you are madly excited," Rosalind said resignedly. One could not change Joanna, and after all the thing was done.

Joanna looked brilliantly amused but tranquil. They were lunching together at her club, with surveys and deeds on the table, surrounding minute portions of food pretentiously.



served. One mushroom on a square inch of toast sat alone under a glass bell by Joanna's plate, while three small gritty stalks fainting in dubious butter represented Rosalind's order of asparagus hollandaise. The club was trying to meet the high cost of living without loss of caste.

"Excited?" Joanna paused to find an adequate measure of her excitement. "It feels like going to be married," she concluded. "I have taken the house for better, for worse—we are committed to each other, and I have an inventory, but I know only its outside."

"That is marriage," Rosalind assented, but the comment in her eyebrows might have been for the wisp of what looked like shingle on the

Frenched chop-bone before her. Rosalind was even alarmingly efficient. Everything about her was well done, her clothes were exactly right, her features were what they should be and her hair became them, and she bore herself as one who knew what success was and would be satisfied with nothing else. No one but Joanna would have dared to offer her such a lunch.

“Perhaps I am going to be happy ever after,” Joanna went on, searching obliviously through a torrent of shad-bones for fragments of shad; “but perhaps it is leaky and cantankerous and will run through all my money. One can get rid of a sufficiently bad husband, but it is very hard to lose a bad house.”

Rosalind gave up the chop and fell back on two tiny triangles of crumbling, pale brown bread.

"One thing—the house won't think you are drawing on it public criticism if you want to work," she observed.

"Woman's place is the home," said Joanna.

"The home and the child;" Rosalind was good-tempered about it. "I hadn't any child, and my home was so organized that I could run it perfectly in twenty minutes a day, yet I wasted years before I found work that wouldn't hurt Howard's feelings. Aren't they curious—men?"

"They're sweet," said Joanna, warmly, dreamily.

"They do try," Rosalind granted them, relenting over some memory.

“You will have to take one sooner or later, Joanna, especially now that you have a whole house.”

“Oh, yes, I want to,” was the placid answer. “Only—it’s very funny, Rosalind, but if a man falls in love with me, there is always something the matter with him. I have noticed it for years.”

Rosalind was concerned. “What sort of thing?” she asked, ready to do something practical and efficient about it if possible.

“Oh, serious drawbacks that you can’t overlook: drink, or two feet shorter than I am, or they already have a wife, or they say ‘How?’ and ‘What say?’ Other women get such lovely ones.”

A breathless maid, serving more

tables than was humanly possible, thrust a luncheon card between them. They ordered in turn the two deserts, but two hectic trips to the pantry brought back the news that both were "out," so they accepted baked apples, receiving each a blackish dome of tough skin with a shrunken residue of apple lurking under its folds. Joanna sawed obliviously with fork and spoon, but Rosalind laid down hers with the gesture of one who gives up. The subject had apparently dropped, but suddenly she returned to it.

"What is the matter with your chief?" she asked.

"Matter with him?"

"Yes; for you."

"What is the matter with the

Prince of Wales?" Joanna spoke patiently. "I am about as likely to be offered one as the other."

Rosalind thought that, over. "Why?"

Joanna began to smile broadly. "He is too finished and complete and reasonable and right; he couldn't stand me, away from the office."

One could see Rosalind mentally setting the chief beside Joanna and appraising the result. "But he has almost too much common sense," she said, then paused, surprised at Joanna's burst of laughter. "I mean, I think you would be good for him," she explained. "He has imagination enough to appreciate you, Joanna. Even I have that. I met him one night at a dinner and he

talked about you in a way—well, it made me wonder, that's all."

Joanna sighed. "Don't," she said. "It is disturbing." Then she signed a check that would once have stood for real food and they went out from electric light into radiant spring sunshine.

"It's funny," Joanna said at parting. "I ordered an enormous lunch and I suppose I ate it—I didn't notice but I think I must have. And yet I don't feel very different."

"No—you wouldn't," Rosalind permitted herself to murmur, but Joanna did not hear.

Rosalind stopped her car before Joanna's door at the appointed minute on Sunday morning. Joanna, of course, kept her waiting, and came

down breathless, dropping things and apologizing. It was curious that one so invariably late did not get over suffering about it. Howard had not come.

"He said he was promised for golf, but I suspect that he did not want to break in on the party," Rosalind explained, her hands resting on the wheel as though they were glad that they need not give it up. She visibly enjoyed her own quick skill as they swung into the crowded avenue.

Cars were streaming forth by the thousand like bees from a hive, all bound for the apple blossoms and dogwood of the great green world outside. The people on the sidewalks looked touchingly lonely and left behind. After they had escaped



the city, Joanna, leaning back in a simmering content, developed her scheme of life.

"The firm has been too beautiful about it;" she loved the firm and took its signs of appreciation as bursts of pure generosity. "Instead of a summer vacation, I am to arrange my work so that I can come out every Thursday night and stay till Monday morning. I will keep a cook out here, and she will have such a nice quiet week that she won't care how many people I bring down over Sunday."

"I wonder," said Rosalind.

"In common decency, she can't," Joanna insisted. "Besides, I shall have only useful guests this first summer, people who can paint and

paper and saw wood and plant vegetables. Oh, Rosalind, won't it be fun!"

"Especially for the guests," Rosalind observed.

Joanna laughed. "Men really like to work with their hands. I know a young sculptor—"

"My dear girl," Rosalind interrupted, "aren't you forgetting that you are still in the early thirties? I don't know at what age an unchaperoned woman can have men guests without scandal—but I shouldn't think any girl would want to reach it."

Joanna looked dashed for a moment; then she had an inspiration. "All right, then; I won't have a regular cook. I will have a working

housekeeper who is a lady when she sits down!" She was touchingly pleased with her idea, but Rosalind was a pessimist about domestic inspirations.

"She will be sitting down most of the time. And if you employ a lady you have to say, 'Suppose we clean the silver!' instead of, 'Please clean the silver.' It is a great bore."

White drifts of dogwood were holding Joanna's dreamy gaze. "The woods look the way the floor did the first time I whitewashed a ceiling," she said, then returned to her problem. "'Suppose we clean the silver,'" she tried it over. "'Wouldn't it be fun to clean the silver!' I don't mind saying that so long as I don't actually have to do it."

"You might. And she would be afraid to stay alone in the house the nights you were away."

Joanna admitted that that was a difficulty, but shrugged it off. "I shall have an idea presently; you can solve anything if you have to," she said blithely. "Oh, isn't it great to have spring come and go out to meet your own dear first-born house!"

They mounted into the hills, rejoicing in the earth's spring song but too used to freedom to realize the wonder of skimming the earth unaided and "unprotected," as it would have been called in the young days of their mothers. Joanna's mother had helped to bring it about, but Rosalind's at sixty had been reluctant to risk herself outside of her own gar-

den without "a gentleman." Small adventures befell them. Once on a detour they took a wrong turn, because Rosalind had a man's objection to asking the way. A tire had to be replaced, and Rosalind seemed to do it in three movements. Near their own village they came up with a man in uniform walking slowly on a lame knee, a heavy bag in his hand. They stopped, of course, and took him in, and Joanna turned in her seat, her face alight with welcome.

"Are you just arriving home?" she asked, thrilled at helping on the happy drama of reunion.

He looked at her remotely, darkly, like one reluctant to leave some somber preoccupation. "This is not my home," he said, and the topic was closed.

Joanna had to go on. Every man in uniform was her heart's kin and a wound made him her own child. "You were in the aviation service," she said, smiling recognition of his cap.

His attention came back slowly; he had to take off his cap and stare at it before he could wholly grasp what had been said. It struck a wrathful laugh out of him.

"Service," he muttered. "My God—*service!*" Then he replaced the cap and turned to the landscape as though he had done with her. He was not intentionally rude; he was only behaving exactly the way he felt. Though he must have been at the end of the twenties, his smooth face had a perennial boyishness; unruly brown

hair lay rough on his forehead and under scowling eyebrows little sea-blue eyes looked out from a world of their own with scant heed for the world of others. The long thin limbs showed a jerky nervousness.

His silence grew oppressive. Rosalind dropped an occasional remark as though he were not there, but Joanna felt tangible currents of distress coming from the back seat. Something was acutely the matter. They passed through the village, henceforth Joanna's own village, but she could take no account of its long main street, where shops and houses and churches were indiscriminately strung, following the line of the valley. At its farthest end Rosalind looked over her shoulder at the passenger.

“Where would you like to be put down?” she asked. Her manner was subtly disciplinary, a reminder that he had scarcely played up to his opportunities.

He started. “Oh—I meant to get out at the post-office.”

She brought the car to a stop and turned to face him. “That was at the other end of the village,” she explained very distinctly. “You are as far away from it now as you were when we picked you up. I supposed you would tell us—”

He had gathered up his bag, fumbling over it, and stumbled out of the car. “Oh, I am sorry—you were kind—thank you,” he exclaimed, looking hopelessly toward them from some far-off place of lost souls. Then he limped hurriedly away.



"Queer individual," Rosalind disposed of him, starting the car, but Joanna was leaning out to look back.

"Something is frightfully the matter," she said unhappily. "And he is so lame—with that heavy bag. Oh, Rosalind, couldn't we turn and pick him up again?"

Rosalind thought they would look rather silly, chasing him down Main Street and probably being refused. He was not a very mannerly person. Joanna continued to look behind them until she saw another car stop for the limping figure; then she settled back with a sigh.

"I hope he remembers to get out this time," she said. "If he would only have told me what was the trouble, I know I could have got an idea

for him. There is always something you can do." Then she was cheered by an inspiration on her own account. "I have it! I'll get a slightly wounded soldier to protect the housekeeper, and he can help about the place for his board. Isn't that perfect?"

Rosalind was not so sure. "How will you find one?" she asked.

"Advertise. Advertise for both of them." And Joanna began working out advertisements on the back of an envelope. Then they turned from the oiled road into a green lane and stopped before brown gables with lace edging, set in a tangle of old garden. Joanna's heart was opened, the birds began to sing; kings might never know the living rapture of that moment.

“Good morning, my house,” she said.

“You didn’t forget the key, did you?” said Rosalind.

Joanna silently held it out, but Rosalind had her appreciation of the event and waved it back.

“No; you open the door,” she said.

The apple blossoms were at the full and beginning to drop, but the lilacs were budding into glory. Their warm breath enveloped Joanna as she mounted the steps of her own front porch and put the key in her own front door. It swung back on a narrow strip of hall, dim, chill and musty.

“Of course, it needs airing,” said Rosalind.

Sitting-room, dining-room, back

hall, kitchen and maid's room below; three bedrooms and bath up-stairs; furnished: so much they had known from the agent. They went from room to room, Joanna silent, Rosalind more and more fluent, piling up encouraging comment.

"The living-room needn't be so dark," she urged. "It's the shape, and the piazza roof. That is a nice old sofa—and you don't have to keep the patent rocker or the carpet. Here is your octagon dining table and the fireplace that had not smoked. Good reason, my dear—it has never been lighted. But it probably doesn't smoke—why should it? And you can do something to the tiles; they don't have to be orange and pink. It has been shut up all winter—that

makes any house smell. You have a very decent back hall; and this must be—" She opened the door into the kitchen, then hastily closed it again. "We must see the up-stairs. One of the bedrooms is quite large—as large as you need. Of course, when you have a delightful sloping roof like yours, it is bound to come down into the bedrooms more or less; you can stand up straight by the bed and bureau, anyway. Isn't a tin tub quaint? I haven't seen one for years. I would open the windows, but they have to be propped with sticks, and the sticks are gone. Look at the lovely outlook you have, hills and your own apple trees." She put a light hand on her friend's shoulder. "With a good roof and a

good cellar, you can do anything in between. And you have your mother's furniture and rugs. That will make all the difference."

Joanna, standing in a stuffy, stained, closetless room with the roof bearing down on her head and two gable windows in its remote corners, came slowly up to the surface on a long breath. Rosalind, feeling speech coming, tightened her kindly hand and smiled hard.

"Oh, isn't it too wonderful!" Joanna breathed.

Rosalind looked sharply into her face, but found there only a swelling content.

"It is all to be done," Joanna went on. "I was so afraid it might be nice enough, so that I would have

more or less to leave it; but it gloriously isn't. Oh, I can push out the partitions and begin all over, do it room by room, as I earn it, till it is perfectly sweet from top to bottom. My head is simply popping with ideas. Oh, Rosalind, it will take years and years! Wouldn't it be cruel if I died now and couldn't do it?"

Rosalind looked from her glowing face to the dingy surroundings that she had been so gallantly defending and sank down on a richly ornamented golden oak bed.

"Joanna Maynard, you are either a fool or a poet," she said irritably. "I should hate to have to decide which."

Joanna took no interest in which

she might be. Inspiration was at the flood. She went mooning about, up-stairs and down, tapping on partitions, climbing out of windows, taking measurements and making unexplained calculations. Rosalind went up the hill to inspect her own delightful house, expertly built, right and complete at every point, and stayed longer than she intended, planning her garden, but when she came hurrying back, Joanna had not noticed her absence. She ate some lunch because it was put into her hands, but she was of no earthly use as a companion. Her whole being was given up to creation. Rosalind contemplated nature as long as she considered reasonable—she sincerely enjoyed nature on her own grounds



with her own garden and her own view, but was a little bored with it elsewhere. Then she put Joanna into the car and turned toward home.

"We will leave the key at Mrs. Haggerty's," she said. "She will give the place a rough cleaning before you come. Just let her know a couple of weeks beforehand."

Joanna rose to the surface for a surprised moment. "Oh, I am moving in Thursday," she said, and slipped back again. They were nearly home before she emerged, tired, smiling, at peace.

"I haven't been very good company," she apologized.

Rosalind did not deny it. "I didn't mind; but you could not do that with a husband," she observed.

Joanna was no longer interested in husbands. "I must put in my advertisements to-night," she said, bringing out the scribbled envelope. "See if you think this will do: 'A professional woman spending half the week in country cottage wants a competent, cheerful working house-keeper, widow or middle aged.' Would you say anything like, 'Must not object to carpenters'? They will be all over the house."

"No; but I would say, 'Must be a good plain cook.' " Rosalind's tone conveyed a criticism.

"Of course. I meant to put that in," Joanna said hastily. "I shall say, 'Must be a good plain cook and willing to do a little of everything.' If I could only get a widowed carpen-

ter or a lady plumber who cooked on the side."

"Well, you can't," said Rosalind, who was tired.

"I know. Here is the other: 'Wanted, by a professional woman who is in town half the week, a slightly disabled soldier who will protect housekeeper in summer cottage and help about the place for his board.' He will have to apply by letter, for I have only three evenings and the housekeepers will take those. Would you say, 'Give references'?"

Rosalind's head-shake gave her up. "Heavens, what you will get!" she said.

## CHAPTER II

### A SLIGHTLY DISABLED SOLDIER

JOANNA'S net, cast out into the city, drew in a strange collection. Worn out school-teachers were ready to come provided that they need not lift anything heavy, and broken-down seamstresses who had never cooked but thought they could, and southern gentlewomen who were willing to do anything that was not "menial," and heavily built, sullen-eyed foreigners who called themselves Swiss, and a shabby, sporting Englishwoman who thought the experience would be no end of a lark, and coldly competent housekeepers who wanted from sev-

enty-five dollars a month up; and Joanna had only to give a faint outline sketch of the present condition of her house to frighten them all away. Rosalind, coming into the office for news on Thursday, found her still cookless.

"Then you can't go out to-night," she said.

"Yes, I can." Joanna was gloomy, obstinate. "I shall miss the lilacs if I don't. I can eat cereals. I am tired of the whole lot of them. Can't cook without gas, can't see without electricity! If another woman asks me with a cold suspicious eye, 'What is your profession?' I shall say—"

"You will do nothing of the sort," Rosalind interposed. Joanna was

often shocking. No doubt an early diet of her mother's books was to blame. "Why don't you go properly to an intelligence office and—"

"Because she has to be a chaperon when she sits down! You wished that on me yourself. If I—"

The telephone interrupted. A lovely, silvery, half laughing voice apologized for intruding.

"I am out of town, and I have only just seen your advertisement," it explained. "I called up your house. If you are not suited, I think I am just what you want!"

A smile of heavenly relief began to smooth out Joanna's face. "I am sure you are," she said. Half a dozen sentences settled it. Joanna waved aside references, Mrs. Rob-

erts did the same by conveniences. She could come that afternoon, would meet Joanna at the ticket office.

"I'm little and blonde," she said. "And I shall know you. I can tell by your voice just how you look." The musical note of laughter made it evident that any one who looked like Joanna's voice looked very nice indeed.

"You can recognize me by my suitcase," said Joanna. "It will be the worst one there." And she turned back in triumph to Rosalind. "I always land on my feet sooner or later," she said.

The way that Rosalind rose to go was a comment, but she did not give it words. "Have you found your soldier?" she asked instead.

The soldier responses had been few and disappointing. Only two had been willing to come without pay, and and one of those was in a wheeled chair.

“So I had to take the other,” Joanna explained. “I couldn’t see him, for he was in the wilds of New Jersey and his letter only came this morning, but he sounded all right, so I telegraphed for him to follow me down to-morrow. I thought perhaps he could cook if no housekeeper turned up. He referred me to two clergymen,” she added in answer to Rosalind’s expression.

The clergymen appeased Rosalind. “What branch of the service was he in?” she asked.

“I don’t know; but the poor boy



has a stiff right arm. He says he can do a good deal with his left. His writing was a little unsteady but perfectly legible. His name is Benjamin Brewer. I like it, don't you?" Joanna's kind eyes already mothered her soldier. "The summer will build him up, and then I shall get him into something with a future. If the place helps one soldier, I shall feel that buying it was worth while. Those good plucky boys! Perhaps later I can take the wheeled chair one, too. I ache over him so!"

Something in her eyes passed into Rosalind's.

"Give me his address; I will look him up," was all she said, but Joanna glowed. Rosalind's looking up

meant always prompt and practical measures.

"You perfect trump!" she said.

"Put it that way if you like," was the enigmatic answer.

Mrs. Roberts also looked like her voice. She was very blithe and light and pretty, and at first sight dismayingly young, though subsequent glances added on successive years. She came unerringly through the crowd to Joanna.

"I knew it!" she said happily, putting out a minute hand.

Joanna's senses were charmed, but a cold doubt rose from secret reservoirs of what must have been race experience, since she had had no specific experiences of her own in the matter of employment.

"But you don't look like a working housekeeper!" she objected, smiling.

Mrs. Roberts was undaunted. "What do they look like?" she asked.

"Well, I don't just know," Joanna had to admit.

"I can cook, I can sew, I can clean house;" she made a song of it. "And you said 'cheerful' in your advertisement; that was what made me want to try it. I'm cheerful. I am alone in the world, I have to do something to support myself. Why not this?"

It certainly sounded all right. Joanna forcibly shut off the part of her being that was acting like Rosalind and accepted her good luck at its face value. This was markedly high.

As they joined the crowd streaming to the train, people looked at her pretty companion and looked again; eager hands helped them with their bags; a youth sprang to give up his seat that they might sit together. Mrs. Roberts accepted it all as the natural attitude of a pleasant world, but Joanna made surprised discoveries. She was seldom aware of the traveling public about her and she had not dreamed that entering into relations with it would feel so festive. It was like being preceded by trumpets or followed by applause. She was vastly entertained. New fields of thought opened before her so interestingly that she forgot to follow the life story that Mrs. Roberts gave her with businesslike candor. Joanna

was always forgetting to listen and so being left in embarrassing ignorance. She gathered that Mrs. Roberts as a girl had "had everything," and that at some period since she had "lost everything" and so had learned the domestic arts; but Joanna missed any characterization of Mr. Roberts that might have been given, and also his end.

"Oh, well, it will come up again," she consoled herself. One could not very well admit that attention had wandered at such a point.

Joanna, enraptured with the dream house she had seen beyond the dismal reality, had had no attention to spare for what Rosalind Messenger saw, but at the journey's end she woke up to a vague anxiety as to what her house-

keeper might see, and tried to utter warnings. It was done reluctantly, tenderly, as one might say of the beloved, "He isn't really handsome, you know," to discount any possible disappointment. But Mrs. Roberts was dismayed at nothing, and when at last they passed under the purple plumes of the lilacs and crossed the sill of home, she was musical with little cries of delight.

Three days of violent scrubbing and airing had made a difference. Old carpets were gone, lamps were filled and shining clean, soiled wisps of curtain had turned luminously white; a fire was burning in a well blacked stove and materials for a first meal were piled on the kitchen table. Mrs. Haggerty was a jewel—

of great price. They wandered over the house, leaning from every window to greet the hills, raised to blue and amethyst mountains under the last sunlight, streaming through the western gorge. They reached up from the grass for apple blossoms and brought in armfuls of lilacs and visited the brook; and Joanna went down to the village for whitewash and brushes, that the little room off the kitchen might be made sweet for their soldier. Already they were calling him Ben. From the treasure trunk, fruit of many movings, they chose the gayest chintzes to brighten his war-shadowed eyes, a soft Navajo rug for his war-weary feet. Darkness came before they could settle down to dinner. Later, under the

sloping roof, Joanna lay burningly awake in her lumpy bed, amazed before the overwhelming richness of life.

She was up at daybreak, white-washing and planning, and by seven o'clock she had two carpenters on the field, ready to begin on the up-stairs partitions; but behind one of these the housekeeper still slumbered.

"She is probably tired out," Joanna conceded, and set her men to tearing down a crumbling back porch as quietly as possible; but an hour later she came out to suggest that they drop things hard.

"I want a few good crashes," she ordered, and listened critically, a glass of milk suspended in one hand.

"All right, lady—down she goes,"



was the amused answer, and an avalanche to awaken the dead followed. It was significant of the eternal boy even in carpenters that from that hour Joanna never had any trouble getting men to work for her, though richer neighbors often begged in vain.

Mrs. Roberts was heard to jump. Water ran, then there was a smell of lamp smoke, connected no doubt with curling tongs, for when she came running down the stairs her head was a golden glory.

"Oh, I am so sorry! Are you starved dead?" she cried.

Joanna, confronting a working housekeeper in a pink smock and the smallest of white pumps, felt another surge of the ancient doubt. Yet last

night's steak had been nicely broiled and buttercups had floated in improvised fingerbowls. To suspect a worker merely because she was a sight to charm the eyes was not sensible.

"Oh, I ate things. Get your own breakfast and then help me clear the way for the carpenters," Joanna said, trying to sound as cheerful as her logic demanded. "We shall have to sleep anywhere these next few nights."

"I think it will be fun," was the blithe answer. Three-quarters of an hour later the housekeeper carried her breakfast table out into the sunshine and decorated it with a trail of grape leaves. From her seat on an old garden bench she waved to Jo-

a burst of song came from the garden.

Mrs. Roberts presently flitted up on her little pumps and finding Joanna in the act of taking down a bed, cried out in protest.

"You ought not to work so hard. Those two nice carpenters will do all this for you. Let me ask them." She was half-way down the stairs before Joanna could stop her.

"They are getting seven dollars a day apiece;" it seemed a sordid objection and Joanna made it reluctantly. "I would rather not interrupt their work if we can help it. Now if you would take one end of this headboard—"

Mrs. Roberts worked very hard for ten minutes, breathing heavily, nurs-

ing hurt fingers, dropping down to recover with gasps of laughing apology, and Joanna, usually the most friendly and good-humored of mortals, darkly refused to notice or respond. The situation was growing strained when a knock below released them.

“Perhaps it is our soldier,” Mrs. Roberts cried, and dashed downstairs.

Joanna had meant to greet him at the door herself, and was ashamed of the resentment that held her back when she heard the housekeeper on the stairs with a masculine step following. She started forward, wiping her dusty hands.

It was the butcher.

“He is going to move those heavy

things for us," Mrs. Roberts announced. "Isn't he too kind?"

The butcher came in beaming on his prey, the summer resident. He was ready to do anything to oblige. He could always mail letters. He could bring out anything they might want at the druggist's or the emporium or any of the shops that did not deliver. He moved furniture under Mrs. Roberts' direction until his fat face was crimson, and the housekeeper, having commissioned him to buy her three hair nets, blonde, cap shaped, rewarded him by an order of two lamb chops.

"I will get two more from the other butcher and see which is the best," she confided when the still hopeful and obliging victim had gone.

“What other butcher?” Joanna asked feebly. She had stood by miserably with protest, longing to tell the poor man that her account would scarcely be worth such labors; it had felt dishonest not to tell him; and yet she could not seem to rebuke her kind little housekeeper.

“Oh, there is always another butcher,” Mrs. Roberts chanted. “There he is now,” she added as a second knock summoned her down.

This time it was an equally obliging grocer. Joanna, looking from a window, saw him taking away a barrel of old cans and bottles that had been left in the cellar, and on his face was a foolish smile. Lively repartee with the ice man followed, and Mrs. Roberts came running up to an-

nounce that he knew a laundress and would carry their clothes to her every week, as he went right by her door, and it would be no trouble. Then the milkman passed, and she went flying down the lane to catch him with a good-will that was warming. She was a nice little thing! She evidently found her first tough subject in the milkman, who could be seen making surly answer, but she stood at his wheel with her hands in her pink pockets and her white pumps firmly planted until even his lean and leathern jaw relaxed and he nodded a half promise. Joanna, watching the tableau, suddenly laughed aloud.

“My chaperon!” she said.

Things went better after that. It was not a rapture, like that first nest-

building in the woodshed a quarter of a century ago, nor intoxicating like some of the later movings, but those had been light-hearted, irresponsible affairs; and if this was more sober, it brought a new and fascinating experience of power. She had always played her game within the limits of other people's doors and windows, but now the roof was the only limit except the financial one, and that grew dangerously unimportant as walls crumbled before her and her dream began to take shape. She secured more workmen. To say, "Do this!" and straightway it was done, savored of magic. Before noon, however, she had to realize that Rosalind's "Suppose we clean the silver!" was not a joke. The house-



keeper was cheerfully willing to keep herself busy, but she hated to be told to do anything as a younger sister hates it from an elder. She had always a counter-argument ready.

"You needn't worry at all about the housekeeping," she assured Joanna as they sat down to luncheon. She had put the table on the porch in a flicker of sunshine; the bright green foreground of grass and apple trees seemed to be set sharply against the smoky blue hills, as though the distance between had been wiped out. Robins called and answered and life was good. "Simply tell me when you don't like anything and it won't happen again," she insisted. "You have enough to see to."

It sounded like a wise and com-

fortable arrangement. Joanna sat smiling assent to the cheerful conversation that she only half heard. She enjoyed having the pretty little person opposite. Rosalind had warned her that it would be deadly at meals. People like Rosalind, who would do things only in the accepted way, lost half the flavor of life. She was pointing this out to Rosalind so absorbedly that she again missed a chance of information about Mr. Roberts. A floating echo of his name brought her back just too late. Then the salad obtruded sharply on her attention.

“Oh, there is something I don’t like—mustard,” she said good-humoredly, laying down her fork.

Mrs. Roberts cried out with dis-

may. She was appalled at the calamity. She wanted to compose a fresh salad, to open preserves, to make chocolate.

“I thought I had such a nice luncheon for you, but if you don’t like your salad, it’s spoiled,” she lamented. “And you will be so hungry before night—oh, it’s too awful! Won’t you let me bring you a glass of milk?”

Joanna protested, praised, laughed, but nothing could console the housekeeper, so she finally submitted to a cup of chocolate. It took a long time, for the fire had gone down, and it was not very good when it came, but she would have taken anything by then. Even mustard would have been preferable to so much grief.

"It has been a miserable lunch for you, but anyway you won't starve," Mrs. Roberts said relievedly, and Joanna weakly praised as she set down the emptied cup. She did want every one to be happy.

"Now we ought to rest," Mrs. Roberts declared. "I don't see any sense in washing dishes three times a day, do you? I shall tuck these out of sight, and perhaps our soldier will help wipe them after dinner. I wish I knew what train the poor boy was coming on; I would go down to meet him."

She flitted off with her tray, leaving Joanna deluged with a fresh gloom.

"What is the matter now?" she scolded herself. And then, as light

answered her honest demand for it, she met it with amused scorn. "Of course, he will fall in love with her! Why shouldn't he? It won't do him any harm, and she is old enough to be his—aunt. What does it matter to me?" And yet it did matter to her. She wanted to be very kind to her soldier boy, but if he was going to jump like those young men on the train to serve the housekeeper, it would not be half so glowing an experience.

"I am, after all, the rudimentary female of our best sellers," she concluded surprisedly. "Rudimentary female" had been one of her mother's phrases. "But just the same, I am going to meet him first," instinct made answer.

The station service had orders to look out for Benjamin Brewer and bring him safely to them, but Joanna decided to meet the afternoon express herself. If he came on that popular train, he might be lost sight of among the arrivals; that was the explanation she had ready in case she encountered Mrs. Roberts as she set out. Theoretically, one need not explain one's actions to the house-keeper; but the theoretical house-keeper does not ask direct and pleasant questions, and Mrs. Roberts did. Joanna slipped out by a side door and down the path that crossed her strip of woodland, making a short cut to the village. She was safely behind the birches and had relaxed her guilty speed when a surprised, "Hello!"

came up from the brook. Mrs. Roberts was kneeling on a stone, gathering watercress.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

Joanna made her explanation, irritated, yet coerced, and edging past. Mrs. Roberts looked down distressfully at her smock and shoes, both showing signs of the day's labor.

"Oh, if you can just wait while I tear into fresh clothes, I will go with you," she exclaimed, starting up. "I won't be two minutes!"

"I can't—there isn't time," Joanna stammered, and hurried on. A slow red had risen in her cheeks and she glowered at the beauty of the trail. "I hate telling lies," she muttered. "Nobody has a right to make

me tell lies!" Then, as irritation subsided, melancholy came over her like a bodily ill. "There is something wrong with me," she worked it out. "That was perfectly natural and sweet of her. I am not nice."

Others were down to meet the train: city ladies in cars with veils swirling about their hats; local belles scantily covered, with distended hair and mouths like red gashes across their powdered faces; stout Jewesses asking one another loudly where the parlor car would stop. The train came in, bringing to each her own, and Joanna looked on with warmly lit eyes, eager to spare her soldier boy a lost and homesick moment. Several soldiers got down with the crowd, but they were met or obviously



knew where they were going. Joanna waited until the platform was cleared of all but an old man standing by a pillar with a bag, smiling about him. As she turned to go, their eyes met, and, seeing a question in his, she stopped.

“Young lady, I wonder if we ain’t looking for each other?” he asked, beaming on her with tranquil benevolence.

“I am afraid not;” she was very kind and sorry about it. “I came to meet a soldier—” And then, seeing that a squared visor jutted sharply above the round face and that the overcoat dated from the Grand Army of the Republic, she stopped short, her heart sliding coldly down her side.

"A slightly disabled soldier," the gentle old voice went on. "My name is Benjamin Brewer—Cap'n for short. I got a ball at Gettysburg but I've got some kick in me yet." He worked the good arm to show her. "I guess I can protect that house-keeper," he added with a wheeze of enjoyment. "That advertisement, it did make me laugh!"

Joanna stood rooted in dismay. "But I meant a soldier out of this war!" she exclaimed. Then she saw a grieved shadow fall on the guileless face, and she could not bear it. She wrenched herself about. "But one war is as good as another to get wounded in," she rushed on. "I am sure you will be the greatest possible help. And far more protection than

a mere boy. I am very glad you came!"

It really was not a lie. Joanna had long ago discovered that if you said a kind thing warmly enough, you were sure to feel it before the words were fairly uttered. And after all, with so perilously pretty a housekeeper, it might be as well not to have a boy. Rosalind would say that. She saw that it was all for the best before she had her soldier established in the one remaining vehicle, and by the time they reached the house, she was marveling at her own trick of alighting on her feet; for the captain, besides being a perfect dear, had been in his day carpenter, painter and gardener, in spite of the stiffened arm. He did not seem very poor;

the ancient overcoat was evidently local color, for his clothes and bag were in good condition and there was obviously no care on his tranquil heart. Asked if he had a family, he said, "Oh, yes!" with the affectionate smile of one who has a very nice family indeed, but he offered no explanations.

The front door flew open before them, and then Mrs. Roberts stood in stricken astonishment, staring at their soldier boy. She was all in freshest white and Joanna felt awkward and apologetic.

"Captain Brewer is a war veteran, but it was the other war," she explained. "Captain, this is Mrs. Roberts, my housekeeper."

"Looks more like an angel to me,"

said the captain happily. "I guess protecting her's going to be a bigger job than I reckoned on." He wheezed with enjoyment and said it again, and the housekeeper's frozen gaze suddenly melted into a smile. She put out a forgiving hand, and Joanna, relieved, turned back to pay her chauffeur. She had not noticed him until this uneasy moment when she had to decide whether he expected a tip. Her fingers paused in her purse, letting the change fall back.

"Where have I seen you before?" she asked.

He started, violently, absurdly, turning to her in hostile alarm, and memory suddenly placed him in the uniform of an aviation officer on the back seat of Rosalind's car.

“Oh, we picked you up on the road last Sunday, that is all,” she hurried on, too kindly bent on reassuring him to wonder.

The alarm subsided into weary relief. “Yes; some ladies did pick me up.” That was evidently all his memory had held of the encounter. He had lost pounds since Sunday, but he had partly emerged from his abstraction. He at least saw Joanna, and, meeting the kindly concern of her look, he lingered.

“I hope I thanked you;” he spoke with worried simplicity. Some discouraged parent must have said it to him so often—“I hope you thanked them!”—that the words had left their imprint on an absent mind.

“You said the proper words,” said Joanna, and smiled.

He could smile at himself, a faint rueful acknowledgment that almost any attack would be justified. "I had to find a job," he muttered, and then, with a light of sudden hope, "You don't want a chauffeur, do you?"

"I wish I did." Joanna longed to help. "When I call up for a car, suppose I ask for you?" she suggested. "Wouldn't that make a good impression at the garage?"

She had helped. He seemed to straighten up all over. "Are you as kind as this to every one?" he asked gravely, starting his engine.

"Oh, well—to soldiers!" Her sigh acknowledged the hopeless size of the debt, but his face only darkened and he reached forward impatiently for

## A SLIGHTLY DISABLED SOLDIER

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the clutch. She had to speak quickly: "What name shall I ask for?"

It seemed to her that the averted face flushed. "Oh—Jones," he said, and sped away, leaving Joanna with an ache in her heart. So many people did that. She went in thankful that there was apparently no need to ache about the captain.

"People are named Jones," she argued to an inner doubt.



## CHAPTER III

### A WORKING HOUSEKEEPER

ALL Saturday the work boiled. The noise and confusion were a song of life to an impassioned nest-builder, but the housekeeper fled to the village, turning to the shops as inevitably as Joanna turned to the hills for solace. The captain went about a beaming sun of happiness. No task was too big or too little for him; he worked until Joanna cried out in protest.

"You have earned a month's board already," she complained. "You will have to rest for twenty-nine days."

"All right, Colonel—just as you say!" The captain saluted joyously, then sneaked off to spade up the vegetable garden.

"I kind of like to feel I'm some good yet," he confided when Joanna caught him at that. He really was a darling with his spade held gun-fashion against his shoulder and the visor of his soldier cap pointing due west.

Sunday brought a sharp change in the weather. Winter had "put his foot in the lap of spring," as Joanna expressed it, trying to make it seem like part of the fun. The house had been designed to admit as little sun as possible and the new openings to the east were still only marks on the plans. Mrs. Roberts was indomit-

ably cheerful, but shivery and obviously miserable. She would not accept a warm sweater and she repudiated thick stockings as though they were something vulgar.

“Oh, I never wear them,” she explained brightly, both hands clasped about her hot coffee cup. She had placed their breakfast table by the kitchen stove, where a mighty fire glowed. Outside the captain could be seen gathering wood for the still virgin fireplace in the dining-room, the Grand Army overcoat flapping at his heels. “It can’t stay so perishing cold,” she persisted. “Wasn’t it ghastly, getting out of bed? I lit my lamp to dress by—just seeing the flame made it more endurable, somehow. If the captain hadn’t had the

kitchen fire going, I think I should have lain down and died!" She was not complaining—not for a moment; her voice laughed. Yet Joanna felt uncomfortable, guilty.

"This is unseasonable," she said. "It won't happen often."

"Oh, but you will have to put in a furnace," Mrs. Roberts assured her. "You can't be decently comfortable without it. Why don't you order it right away, so that you won't have to be torn up twice?"

A furnace was a depressing thought. Joanna wanted to put what money she had into charm. "I don't believe you need it in a summer house," she said worriedly.

Mrs. Roberts was inexorable. "You plan to stay late in the autumn,

don't you? You are robust and of course it doesn't matter about me, but you can't have your guests sitting on their feet and wishing they were dead, they're so wretched. Visiting is a chilly business, anyway; you're colder in other people's houses than in your own. And guests are so apt to wish they hadn't come, don't you think? If you can't have a fire in every room and some one to keep it going, you really will have to have a furnace."

Guests, happy guests, who were glad every moment that they had come, had been a glowing part of the dream. Joanna finished her coffee in depressed silence as the captain came in, rosy and sunny, with his load.

"She sure is a chilly little lady," he declared, pausing to smile on the housekeeper. "My, she was glad to see my fire this morning!"

"And the captain had got his own breakfast and washed his dishes before I came down," Mrs. Roberts said with rewarding admiration. "Isn't he wonderful?"

One could see future surprises hatching in the captain's good heart. Joanna slipped away from the badi-nage that followed. Later, passing through the kitchen, she found the captain washing the breakfast dishes while the housekeeper sat with her white pumps in the oven, cheering him on. Joanna went past, hesitated, came reluctantly back.

"Hadn't we better get the beds

made and the house in order?" she suggested very genially, as one good comrade to another.

No "we," no geniality, could make a suggestion acceptable. "There is no use trying to have a clean house while all this carpentering is going on," Mrs. Roberts explained patiently. "The beds won't take two minutes. I am letting them air on purpose."

Joanna went on; then an unhappy consciousness that it was after all her house drove her back.

"You know, if we make the dining-room habitable and light the fire," she said in a bright-idea tone, "it will be like an oasis in all this confusion. I should be awfully glad if you could do that now."

Mrs. Roberts shrugged, smiled faintly to herself at thoughts not complimentary to others, brought down her feet and rose. "You can't expect to have heavy cleaning done on Sunday," she said with fixed cheerfulness. "I will do what I can."

"And throw out the withered lilacs," Joanna added, emboldened with success.

Mrs. Roberts loathed being told to throw out the withered lilacs. She pretended that she had not heard. Her humming proved that she was doing exactly what she had intended to do as she went off with duster and mop. A few moments later she took pains to say to Joanna:

"Those lilacs were fading, so I threw them out. I hate shabby



flowers, don't you?"—her fingers tucked into her neck for warmth and one ankle curled about the other.

"She hasn't learned to be hired yet, that's all," Joanna reminded an exasperated self. But the pleasantness was wiped out of the morning. Home was becoming a problem instead of a thrilling game. The ridiculous encounter had actually registered in her knees, in her throat. She slipped out of the beloved house with a sense of escape and went frowning up the hills.

"Some one who would do the work and not be a nuisance," she demanded. "It ought to be either a coolie or a college graduate—nothing in between!"

The painted fields glittered to the

sun, the morning bloom was still untouched on the encircling mountains; only man was vile. Joanna walked herself into peace and pleasantness, and then fairly ran back to the little brown house where there were so many enchanting things to do and to invent. Ideas began to rocket up; she had a priceless inspiration for a hat and shoe cupboard under the slant of the roof and her fingers yearned for the yardstick as she ran down the last slope.

Over the gate leaned the housekeeper looking anxiously up and down the lane. She met Joanna's appearance with a cry of relief.

"Oh, I have been so frightened!" she exclaimed.

"Frightened?"

"About you! Why, you simply vanished—and you were gone hours." Mrs. Roberts had a righteous grievance, though she was cheerful about it. "If I had known any way to telephone or to look for you—why, I was worried to death!"

"I only took a walk," Joanna explained.

"But you didn't tell me you were going," was the bright reproach. "I should have loved to go with you. I was longing for a walk."

Joanna went on into the house with a step that had grown heavy. "Why didn't you take a walk yourself?" She made the suggestion very gently, in terror of wounding.

"Alone?" Mrs. Roberts shivered. "I would rather die! I have been

too worried to get lunch, but it won't take long," she added. "Would you awfully mind setting the table?"

So Joanna put off her inspiration, and after lunch she played parchesi to make up for the lonely morning. She did sincerely want every one to be happy. Mrs. Roberts' happiness seemed to lie in a bright torrent of conversation. After the interminable games, it followed Joanna up and down about the house all the afternoon. Mrs. Roberts wanted to know what she was planning, wanted to hold the other end of the measuring tape, was so vividly present that Joanna, accustomed to the big, happy working silences of her years alone, finally clasped her head with a bursting sigh.

“Ah, you’re tired to deff,” said the kind little housekeeper. “I’m going to make you a cup of tea.”

In the merciful silence that followed, Joanna fled to the garden, dragged a step-ladder among the lilacs and climbed to its top as though pursued. The lovely world about her was drenched in late sunlight, but she sat with bent head, seeing with new vision the ancient problem of the home. At Mrs. Roberts’ call, bird-blithe, operatic, she started and went briskly to work, breaking the strangle-hold of a grape-vine that had dropped down snake-like from the veranda roof on a lilac’s budding top.

“Give it to me up here,” she said. Mrs. Roberts insisted that she



At Mrs. Roberts' call, bird-blithe, operatic, she started and went briskly to work, breaking the strangle-hold of a grape-vine that had dropped down snake-like from the veranda roof on a lilac's budding top.

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TILDEN FOUNDATIONS  
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worked too hard, explained that the tray was set for two while the ladder would accommodate only one, laughed at her and finally bade her come down; Joanna clipped on with a fixed smile.

"I want it up here," was all she would say.

"You're too killing!" Mrs. Roberts finally yielded, removing her own share and passing up the tray. She tried to be sociable from the veranda, but Joanna seemed a little deaf, and presently she went back to the kitchen, where the captain, filling the wood-box, was cheerily ready for conversation.

Joanna, the tray across her knees, stared glumly into the future. There was need, desperate need, for one of



her inspirations, but her problem was as big as human nature, and no one harassed householder could solve it at a bound. She certainly could not take all her meals on the tops of ladders. She thought longingly of her secretary at the office—quiet, businesslike, impersonal, meeting a criticism as something to be acted on with the least possible fuss, not with wailings and unfair contrition that never let up! Joanna had had to hear fresh laments about the ruined salad at every meal. She had that day swallowed a large and loathed slice of liver, lest she start a new grief. The secretary, too, had at one period of her life “had everything”; was it because her nice face had no beauty that she could take on train-

ing? Were the pretty women a sort of royalty, hopeless as subordinates?

"I'd give something to know what became of Mr. Roberts," she muttered darkly, finishing her chilled tea.

She had to go in eventually, and only the dining-room was habitable. Mrs. Roberts had kindled a fresh blaze, before which stood a table and the parchesi board.

"Supper is started, and we shall have time for another game," she explained happily. "That darling captain will look after the oven."

Joanna had a trapped glare. Then she set down the tea tray on the nearest chair and backed to the door.

"I have to go to town," she said confusedly. "I must be at the office early. I can just catch the train. Will you call a cab?"

"But I have made a cherry pie for supper!" Mrs. Roberts wailed.

"Ask them to send Jones," Joanna called back, unfastening her blouse as she ran.

"And I wanted to consult you—"

A slammed door cut her short. The car was at the gate in four minutes, and Joanna reached it almost as soon.

"Do anything you like!" she cried to a shower of questions.

The car shot forward. "I don't think you can make the train, but I'll try," said Jones.

He did try. Aviation had evidently taught him scorn for the mere perils of earth. They leaped down the hill, took the village street like a cannon-ball, rounded the last corner

on one wheel—only to see the train pulling out.

“Oh, damn!” muttered Joanna. It had been one of her mother’s words.

Jones visibly warmed and glowed. When the bitter scowl relaxed, his face had a boyish goodness and candor and the sea-blue of the little deep-set eyes came vividly to light. “There is another train at nine,” he suggested, eager to help.

“But three hours!” Joanna looked open despair at him and waited. She was past effort.

“I could take you home and then—”

“No. I can’t go back again. Not possibly.” She offered no explanation and he accepted it simply, as

though he often had those moods himself and had never questioned their reasonableness. He considered, then turned the car back to the village.

"You can get supper at the Fairview, such as it is," he explained. "They give you a pale limp slice of meat that might have come off any large animal, and stewed tomatoes that are thick in one spot and water everywhere else, and pale blue mashed potatoes, very stiff, and a square inch of cottage pudding with a pool of sweet glue beside it; but it doesn't do you any real harm."

Joanna was visualizing the meal. "I think my food is often rather like that," she said, mildly surprised.

He laughed with sudden loudness,

as though his laugh had not been used for a long time. "Then I wish you would take me on as a cook," he said. "It is about the best thing I do."

Mention of a cook brought back her gloom. "I can't use up more than an hour over that; and then it will be only seven o'clock," she complained as he stopped before a large white-verandaed boarding-house.

"There are movies in the next block, if you don't scorn them."

"I don't scorn anything that doesn't talk," said Joanna, getting heavily down.

Jones turned brick red, and before she could translate his hurt, incredulous stare, he had jerked the car into motion and sped away.

“The young idiot!” she muttered after him. She had no words strong enough for her impatience. Only a morbid egotism could have taken that as a personal insult. He could be hurt, then, if he was so silly. She went in with the step of a disciplinarian and tried to stay indignant; but all through supper her good heart was miserable. When she had obviously emptied a vast white plate surrounded by a fleet of bird bathtubs, she abandoned a fainting mound of what the waitress called vanilla cream to call up the garage; but Jones was off duty and had gone. Joanna’s mother used to warn her that a too great dread of wounding was a weakness. Mrs. Maynard herself had rather enjoyed delivering a

hearty whack on a sensitive spot, and an evening of anguish at having seemed to snub a chauffeur would have been beyond her comprehension. But Mr. Maynard would have understood.

Joanna went listlessly into the moving-picture house, finding a place in the darkness of an educational interlude, and tried to take an intelligent interest in the rubber forests of New Guinea or some such theme; but her heart ached on and on, and calling the ridiculous person names could not give it ease. She turned in exasperation from the rubber workers rushing about at movie speed, and so, with a leap of pulses, a healing flow of relief, she saw Jones.

He was sitting rigidly erect,



across the aisle, scowling at the picture, arms tightly folded across his chest, but the hands under them betraying a nervous twitch. The seat beside him was empty, and Joanna, gathering up hat and coat, serenely transferred herself to it. She neither looked at him nor spoke and he apparently did not recognize her presence, but gradually the rigidity melted from the long slight body, the hands under his arms grew quiet. The comic picture, following the rubber forests, made her laugh, a warm contralto note that would have acquitted any one of unkindness. Jones' heavy brows unbent. When humor gave place to advertisements, she slowly turned her head. Jones tried hard to preserve his cold unconsciousness,

but her straight look, kind, humorous, understanding, was as compelling as a hand against his cheek. He had to turn and meet it.

"Not bad, was it?" said Joanna.

He was helplessly honest. "I didn't notice," he said bleakly.

"Nobody smashed a banana on any one; I enjoyed that," she admitted. "And when one has been sitting under four mortal hours of light running domestic conversation, almost anything is a relief. My mother used to call a cousin of hers 'the autochat at the breakfast table.' Don't you like that?"

If he was easily cast down, he was as easily raised up again. His sudden crow of laughter startled the neighbors, but he was shinningly un-

aware of them. He had vivid eager things to say about tastes and discoveries in the matter of conversation, and Joanna was so glad to see him comforted that she gave back her own discoveries, quite oblivious that this was only a chauffeur named Jones. As a preserver of the social order, she was hopeless.

Then the drama was unrolled, holding them both spellbound. No two children in the audience were more tensely absorbed in the heroic adventures of a certain Susan with a band of train robbers. When at a critical moment later comers blocked their view, Jones muttered wrath, craning round them; but Joanna came back to earth with a shock. Fluffy and golden against the light

passed the effervescent head of her housekeeper above a sweater of rose silk; after her came the beaming captain, trailing his Grand Army overcoat over a patient row of laps. They settled down in seats not ten feet distant.

Joanna did not often concern herself with appearances, but for once she was wide awake to them. She had left for the city three hours earlier, and to explain her presence in the village with a strange young man turned half toward her in his seat, sharing with her his visible emotions, was going to be difficult. The candid truth could not be told to a kindly little person who meant so very well. Joanna was rested and refreshed, and so ready to call her

past impatience unreasonable. Mrs. Roberts, giving the captain a lovely time, making a spot of brightness that drew neighboring eyes away from the drama, was a remarkably nice little soul, and the one way not to hurt her was to get out unseen.

"I am going now," she whispered, slipping out of her seat. "Don't follow. I would rather you did not."

"But it isn't time—you have hours!" He was protesting in a resounding whisper. She literally ran.

Joanna did her conscientious best by Monday's work, but Tuesday found her preoccupied, troubled. On Wednesday morning she went to her chief.

"I feel exactly like a cat that is shut away from her kittens," she told him distressfully. "Heaven only knows what the carpenters are doing to my house! There is a pile of work I can take out with me. If you don't let me go I shall die."

The chief laughed and bade her run to her kittens, and on the way out Joanna faithfully read manuscript; but at the journey's end her heart was beating as though a lover awaited her instead of a little old brown house. She took the nearest cab, forgetting to look for Jones, and was out at her gate before it could stop.

The house was there, safe and sound—but curiously still. The work inside had boiled up against

the windows and even here and there through the roof, and then stopped short. Joanna felt a pang of fright. Her step on the gravel roused no stir. The front door opened on the confusion she had left Sunday night; in the dining-room the parchesi board still waited by the ashes of Sunday's fire. She hurried on to the kitchen and there at least was life. A fire glowed in the stove and the captain was in the act of putting a pan of biscuits into the oven. His happy welcome took the sinister hush out of the quiet.

"Well, now, that's fine," he greeted her. "We wasn't looking for you till Thursday night. I'll have lunch ready in half an hour if my sody biscuits—"

"Where is Mrs. Roberts?" Joanna cut in.

The captain met the name with affectionate chuckles. "She sure is a sleepy little lady! She likes her breakfast about when most folks like their lunch. I guess she'll be down pretty soon now."

"I guess she will," Joanna muttered, and left the room with a strong step.

The housekeeper was on the stairs, looking ridiculously young in a white middy and short skirt. She cried out at sight of Joanna, a joyous carol.

"Oh, I have been so lonely, I nearly perished!" She rushed down to shake hands. There was not a cloud on her rejoicing. "How did you get away? Can you stay?"



Joanna's righteous wrath was fading to a feeble glumness. After all, there was no especial reason that the housekeeper should get up. Anyway, that could wait. "Where are the carpenters?" she broke in.

"Oh, the carpenters!" They were a trying memory. "They kept asking me questions, and how could I answer? You had not explained your plans to me." That was a bright reproach. "So I told them they had better knock off till Friday. I was nearly dead of their noise; it did feel good to have a breathing spell. They were glad to go," she added, seeing storm in Joanna's face. "Some one else had been trying to get them."

"Exactly. And will probably ob-

ject to giving them up.” Joanna spoke very distinctly. “Don’t you think that to dismiss my workmen was a little out of your province?” She had to say it. She knew that she would be made to wish she had not, but the bitterness of having lost her carpenters could not be swallowed without a sign.

Mrs. Roberts’ voice rose in wailing protest. “Oh, and I meant so well! How could I tell how the door ought to open and which way you wanted the bathtub?”

“Right side up,” said Joanna grimly. “Why didn’t you telephone?”

“But you told me to economize! And—”

“Economize—yes. We didn’t need

squabs for breakfast! But not—" Joanna gave her up with a large gesture of despair. "Where are they working?"

"Oh, miles from here—the Italian villa you can see from the road. Oh, I have spoiled everything for you! You must simply hate me! I shall never dare decide anything again. And yet it seemed so dreadful to let them make mistakes and—"

It was the familiar lament of the salad. It would go on and on for days if measures were not taken. Joanna forced herself to a smile.

"Well, it was a mistake, but I need not have been so savage," she said. "Let me have a sandwich and I will go up and snatch them back. Two days isn't a killing matter."

"Ah, if you are so sweet about it, I shall feel worse than ever," Mrs. Roberts mourned. She was so upset that Joanna had to make her own sandwich. The grief followed her through the gate.

"If you would only let me go, I know I could get them back for you," she cried, and a suspicion that perhaps she could where Joanna herself might fail did not add to the general harmony. Her militant mother could not have gone forth more strongly or come back more successful. A trail of sheepish carpenters followed her.

All that week the work seethed. Joanna added plumbers, more carpenters and an electrician. Her capital was gone, her salary mortgaged.

## JOANNA BUILDS A NEST

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A passion as real as the gambler's or the drug fiend's held her silent, brooding, intent on the perfecting of her nest. Mrs. Roberts might have stayed in bed all day and Joanna would not have noticed; but she appeared, somewhat martyred, shortly before breakfast and fled the house soon after. Had Monday followed directly on Saturday, Joanna would not even have remembered the office; but the sudden hush of Sunday gave her a chance to wake up. The fever died down, conscience struggled back to life. She put from her hand the yardstick, magic rod of all her creating, and sat herself down in the sun with a pile of typed manuscript.

Joanna worked as absorbedly as she dreamed and a disturbance had

to be very positive to reach her attention. The high indignant voice had been going on for some minutes before she was aware. It was a strange voice, hearty in its wrath, and she could hear the captain arguing soothingly against it, with recurrent gurgles of laughter. He gradually gave in; there was a tolerant, "All right, Pussy, all right!" Then he came round the corner of the house alone, his round face rueful yet a rising sun of mirth. He came close to Joanna and spoke cautiously.

"I got to go, I'm afraid."

"Oh, no!"

The grieved protest went straight to his good heart.

"I'm real sorry! It isn't that I'm tired of you ladies or the place—I

like it fine. But my daughter—" his thumb indicated the unseen presence round the corner—"she won't go without me, I guess. She's kind of upset."

"Didn't she know you were here?" Joanna asked.

"Know it!" A middle-aged woman, hot and exasperated, was bearing down on them through the lilacs. Her black brows were not derived from the captain, but her hat had the same tendency to coast about on her head. One hand mechanically pushed it to a precarious straightness as she faced Joanna. "Wouldn't you think a man over eighty, who had a good home and a family that thought the world of him, would know enough not to run away?" she

demanded. "That's the third time he's done it—he says he is going to visit my brother and he sneaks off and takes a job! Wouldn't it make you sick?"

Joanna mournfully admitted that it would. "But I can't get along without him," she cried.

Pussy relented a little, her hand falling on the captain's shoulder. "No more can't we. My, we've had a time finding him! You can just pack up your bag and come along this minute," she issued her orders, and the captain turned meekly to obey.

"I kind of like to feel I'm some good yet," he confided to Joanna.

Pussy would not stop even for a cup of tea; she had kept the car that brought her up from the station, and



Joanna, waving them off, received a sober salute from Jones. She thought that he looked more at peace; but not ten minutes later the car was racing back again and Jones came up the path at a limping run. He was breathless, wild, and Joanna, fearing an accident, hurried out to meet him.

"Have you filled his position? You haven't taken any one else?" he cried, nervous hands clenched, lifted face all ready for despair. Joanna abruptly sat down on the front steps.

"I thought you had killed the captain," she scolded him.

Jones had a single-track mind; only one idea could go through at a time.

"I could do anything that he did," he urged, the little sea-blue eyes

clinging to her drowningly yet without hope, as though he had no general luck to count on. "You would only have to show me once what you wanted. My knee's getting better—"

It was kindest to cut him short. "But I did not pay the captain," she explained. "I really can't—"

"Splendid! Then I would have several hours a day for myself, wouldn't I? Now I only get nights."

"But you are too young," she objected.

"I am thirty."

"Yes; but my housekeeper is young, too."

"But I don't like her," he said with simple candor.

Joanna's heart warmed to him.

"Why not?"

He was not interested in his reasons. "Oh, she is always in the post-office. I can't stand that post-office bunch," he disposed of Mrs. Roberts. "Couldn't you try me for a week?"

The voice of Rosalind spoke through Joanna's lips: "But I don't know anything about you."

Color rushed to his forehead, and before his eyes fell Joanna saw the lost-soul look that had so wrung her on their first meeting.

"They will tell you at the garage that I don't drink and that I'm a hard worker," he muttered. Then his head jerked up; he struck his cap across his knee as though he struck away something noxious. "I tell you myself that I am truthful and decent! Won't that do?"

"Yes," said Joanna, and put out her hand.

"Thank you," was all he said, but his hand clung to hers and for an instant his chin trembled.

Then Joanna had an inspiration. "Do you know anything about building? Could you oversee carpenters and keep them going?"

"I'd be better than nothing," he said, brightening. "My father was an architect and he tried to make one of me. It couldn't be done, but at least I know the lingo. I can understand a plan."

"Heaven has sent you," said Joanna solemnly.

They went over the house together, over the plans, over the house again. Jones was gloriously inflammable;

his single-track mind saw house and house only for a flying hour and he knew the difference between an inspired and plain idea—he did not miss one of Joanna's inspirations. They might have kept at it all day but for a sobering interruption. The garage telephoned to ask if one of its cars had duly appeared when summoned, as it had not returned.

"Oh, yes—yes, it is here," Joanna said with an embarrassed memory of the forgotten car at the gate.

"Thought the driver might have skipped with it; we don't know much about him," the garage explained.

Joanna hung up in depressed silence. Jones had heard enough to send him down the path at a limping run.

"Well, there isn't much to steal here and he doesn't like Mrs. Roberts," she argued against a vision of a disapproving Rosalind.

Mrs. Roberts received the announcement of the new protector without enthusiasm. She was standing in the middle of the kitchen, looking drearily at the stove where the captain's last fire glowed, at the implements with which he would even now have been getting lunch.

"I know—the one you go to the movies with," she cut short the explanation, leaving Joanna stricken silent. "I have never spoken three words to him myself, but if you know all about him, of course it is all right."

It was the moment for Joanna to

admit that she knew nothing whatever about him, but she let it pass.

"He is coming in the morning, and he will look after the carpenters," she said cheerfully.

Mrs. Roberts lifted the kettle as though it had grown suddenly heavy. "I don't see how we are going to get along without the captain," she sighed. "There is more to do than you realize. It isn't as if you helped." And she turned on the water full force as though to drown any reply.

Joanna attempted none. She went out into the sunshine and spoke bitterly to the encircling hills on the subject of "lady help."

"And, after all, I know as much about Jones as I do about her," she

scolded on. "I would trust him a good deal further! He doesn't spend an hour a day curling his silly hair! And he doesn't speak with honeyed sweetness when he wants to bite nails! I don't wonder Mr. Roberts died or something. I'll bet it was something," she added darkly as the housekeeper's caroling cry summoned her to the hated luncheon table.

And then, of course, Mrs. Roberts made her ashamed. She was cheerful again, eager to please, ready to laugh—a thoroughly nice little person. It was ridiculous not to like her. Jones inevitably would.



## CHAPTER IV

### JONES

JOANNA stayed heroically by her desk the next week, though the strain visibly told on her. She was not uneasy about her carpenters with Jones in charge, nor tormented by suppressed ideas, for the creative flame had died down; nor was she homesick—for a clattering, rushing, bleak white dairy lunch-room would have seemed to her more peaceful than her own vine-hung veranda with Mrs. Roberts across the board. But she was curious, restlessly, maddeningly curious, about developments in her household. Jones had limped up

with his bag as she left for the train and she had seen Mrs. Roberts offer pretty greeting. Jones' response had borne out his own assertion that he did not like her. He had not intended a snub; he had merely acted just as he felt. She had given no sign, but she would not let a challenge like that pass unnoticed. Joanna had seen her win over into a devoted servitor every man who came within reach of her blithe friendliness; it was only a question of how long he could hold out.

Thursday morning the chief paused by Joanna's desk, a smile coming.

"How are the kittens?" he asked.

"Oh, I can stick it out until the four o'clock train," she assured him, straightening up to the work before her.

"Am I going to see the house some day?"

That was a new idea, and she faced it with alarm. "You wouldn't like a house unless it were pure French château or Italian renaissance or Yorkshire Airedale," she objected. "Mine is only a beloved little mongrel, brown and cozy and gothic."

One of the chief's ways of enjoying Joanna was to look tried almost beyond endurance. He exposed his taste to shock much as children say, "Scare me!"

"The cozy gothic—my dear Miss Maynard, what a vision!" He held his high forehead as though it literally pained. Everything about the chief—head, nose, shoulders—was high and narrow: gothic, but not cozy.

"I am doing wonderful things to it," she confided. "I hope you won't fail or anything until I get it paid for."

"I will try not. And you are not lonely out there? Or bored?" He could not quite understand that.

She shook her head rather wistfully. It always hurt for a moment to realize that her joys meant nothing to people like the chief and Rosalind. "I sometimes think I am the only really happy person on earth, except children and idiots," she said, and so struck a laugh out of him.

"I am coming," he warned her as he passed on.

The day at last came to an end, and Joanna ran home. The little house had already a new aspect. Its roof

had opened windows to the sun and the two strips of covered porch that had strangled the front between them were gone. The door that had once opened on a dismal length of hall half choked with stairs, now led Joanna into a sunny gallery; clogging partitions had fallen, and the broad south, formerly given over to the kitchen regions, had been scooped out to make the living-room of her dreams, broad and gracious, with its wide hearth already outlined and its windows looking three ways. Coming upon it suddenly, with her thoughts fixed on human problems, Joanna rediscovered her home. She stood in the doorway staring as she had stared that first day when she came down the hill with the Messengers

and found her house. In her fixed eyes was the look that artists give to a dawning masterpiece, on her lips the smile of women for their new babies.

An outburst of operatic song came from the back of the house. The voice rose to a high trill, liked it and tried it again, laughed and lilted and soared. Then a door burst open and Jones came through as though fired from a cannon, his eyes wild under a boyish shock of hair, his nervous hands protesting aloft. Blank book and pencil fell from them as he saw Joanna.

"I suppose she has to do that," he exploded. Then he picked up the blank book and rammed it into a pocket.

"When I advertised for a house-keeper," Joanna explained with amused gravity, "I insisted that she should be cheerful."

"Cheerful—my God, you got it," he muttered.

"I like it also in the hired man," she went on.

A rueful smile struggled to the surface. "It is good to have you back," he said, relaxing visibly to peace. "Everything will be all right now."

"Hasn't it been all right?"

"Oh, yes—yes. Perfectly." He did not want to tell tales. "The men have done wonders. Will you come and see?"

"I will tell Mrs. Roberts I am here first," she said, and passed on to the kitchen.

It was one of Mrs. Roberts' ways to start violently when any one came upon her unannounced. The jump and the cry always ended with laughter and a hand over her heart and Joanna usually tried to give back the expected amusement. It was silly to find a small matter like that annoying. Yet to-night, greeted by the familiar drama, she understood why people cast away together on desert islands learn to hate one another.

"How is everything?" she asked with a rather rigid geniality.

Mrs. Roberts closed the kitchen door before she spoke.

"Do you mind telling me what this man Jones is supposed to do?" she asked in a voice that was careful not to comment.



"He is still holding out," was Joanna's secret thought. It was what she had run home to find out, and with the answer had come a sudden weariness, a longing for peace and harmony. "Why, he is to oversee the work and help a little about the place in return for his board," she explained.

"Is he to have a large dinner cooked for him every day?" There was a threat under the words; and if Mrs. Roberts left, nobody else would come. Every one said that.

"Merely an ordinary dinner such as you get for yourself;" poor Joanna tried to sound heartening.

"I don't get a dinner for me," was the unrelenting answer. "I simply have an egg when I feel like it. He

doesn't lift a finger for himself—sits here and *waits*."

"I suppose the housekeeper generally does do the cooking;" Joanna offered that as a bright discovery, then made a cowardly move to escape; but Mrs. Roberts held the door.

"One thing more: is he supposed to fly into a passion if he is asked to put up a clothes-line?"

"No; he certainly is not." Joanna was glad to concede something.

"Well, I have found him so dis-obliging that when I want anything heavy lifted I ask the Messengers' gardener." Mrs. Roberts yielded up the door. "I could find you a dozen men who would be more useful, but of course if you are interested in him—"

"I am interested in helping him," Joanna interrupted.

"Why does he need help—a lieutenant in the air service, with a fraternity pin on his pin-cushion? Hasn't he any people?" Fortunately, she did not stop there. "And why does he turn so black if you ask him about his experiences over there? Are you sure he got over?"

Joanna was slipping through the door. "I am sure he has been hurt," she said.

"So was the Messengers' gardener," Mrs. Roberts called after her. "He got a wound in the shoulder, but he is not afraid of work!"

Jones was waiting within earshot, but he would never overhear anything; if his attention was not openly

demanded, he went off into some world of his own. Usually it was a troubled or wrathful absence, but to-night he shone with happy anticipation. He was as intent on the nest as Joanna herself.

She was amazed at her own handiwork. A bleak and comfortless collection of rooms, born of hideous stupidity, was blossoming into a home of charm and graciousness, modest still, but inviting, livable, individual. Only a creator could have known just how good it was. Mrs. Roberts thought that it could have been made to do with far less fuss and expense; but Jones marveled with her to her heart's content. The summons to dinner came before they had half spent their enthusiasm.

"Oh—one thing;" Jones detained her, suddenly troubled and fumbling for words. "If I am to have half the day for—well, for myself—that was the idea, wasn't it?"

"It certainly was."

"Then if I could have that free—uninterrupted?" He had flushed. "I hate to make a fuss! But I am trying to—to do something; and if I am called off every fifteen minutes to move a sofa or open a stuck window—why, nothing gets done. I would work till I dropped for you," he added vehemently.

Joanna promised to see to it, as the head of the house must, and reluctantly obeyed the still yodeling summons. That Jones, lieutenant and college man, should eat alone in the

kitchen, did not seem quite reasonable, but she had enough to attend to without raising that issue. Joanna would gladly have yielded the house-keeper the dining-room and taken a plate on the back porch herself, but the head of the house may not escape the head of the table.

After dinner Mrs. Roberts sighed aloud for the captain and explained that it was funny how quickly the dishes were put through when two did them, while attacking them alone made one want to lie down and die, and Joanna, who longed to have every one happy, was acutely miserable behind her refusal to understand. She had to get out manuscript that awaited judgment and go to work, lest she seem too cruelly cal-

lous of the labor of others. She carried the typewritten piles to the new west veranda, and presently lost her own depressed identity in the sweep of a stirring narrative. Her instinct for a best seller was simply her power of fresh enjoyment. A ton or so of manuscript novels a year could not stale her response to a good tale or a living character. When Jones, pausing in the path below, asked a question, she looked at him blankly, trying to fit what he had said into the context that still held her.

"I only wondered if you cared for these," he said, swinging himself up to the railing with an offering of wild roses.

She emerged and fearing lest she had seemed ungracious, thanked him

doubly, dwelling on their delicate loveliness; but Jones' eyes had fixed on the pile of manuscript with an astonished stare.

"Do you—" he began. "Are you—" He seemed too awed to find the words.

"No, I don't write novels," she said amusedly. "I publish them."

Even that seemed to overwhelm him.

"I—didn't know it," he stuttered.

"What did you think I went to town for?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought."

That was so like him that it made her smile. She told him a little about her firm and her work and he listened with gratifying stillness.

"And it is thumbs up or thumbs



down for some poor chap right here on this veranda to-night?" he exclaimed.

She tapped the manuscript before her. "This is good," she said. "Reckless and rather bitter, but it lives and moves and bites. It is about one T. Windham Goold who apparently told huge lies, but they always turned out to be true. The astonishing thing did everlastingly happen to him—in the war, at sea, in the air; but nobody would believe. He finally in disgust tries to kill himself—is miraculously saved, and no one will believe even that. So finally he takes to truck gardening, and discovers a new squash, and everybody believes that because they can eat it; and so he becomes famous. It is ex-

aggerated, but poor Windygoold is a real person, as real as his squash. I began it on the train and nearly went by my station."

He had listened as intently as a child listens. "Then it's thumbs up?"

She turned back to the title page. "'Windygoold, by Curtis Webb,'" she read. "Do you know that name?"

To her surprise, he did. One never expected general information from Jones.

"Short stories," he said, after a pause.

"Yes. Rather unusual ones. This is his first long book. But there is something associated with his name—something unpleasant. I know I have heard it in an ugly con-

nection. We shall have to look it up before we decide. The book came through an agent—he may know.”

Jones slowly swung himself about as though to drop off the veranda, then paused, back turned, elbows digging into his knees.

“Why isn’t the book the thing? What does it matter whether the man who wrote it was a crook or a Sunday-school superintendent?” he asked vehemently.

“If he had been an active pro-German, it might not sell,” she reminded him. “And if he had been convicted of plagiarism, it might not be his own. You have to know with whom you are dealing. He may only have produced a play that was roasted. I can find out.”

Jones dropped off and strode away, and presently Joanna heard the clicking of a spade down in the vegetable garden. It was working furiously in the neglected plot. Occasionally a stone crashed off through the bushes.

“What possesses him, working at this time of night?” she demanded, rising to go to stop it. Then the voice of Mrs. Roberts arrested her. It was rippling joyously into the telephone.

“Oh, Mr. McCurdy, it is me again. You’ll *hate* me. But I want my trunk taken down into the cellar and there is no one here that I can ask to do it, don’t you know?..... You’re the kindest—!..... Well, I should simply lie down and die

without you, that's all.....To-night? Oh, I wish I could! But my work isn't nearly done—I won't be through before nine o'clock, or ten. No one helps me, you see..... Ask me some other night and I shall simply leave the old dishes. I adore the movies.....K. P.?..... Oh, you are too good, but I couldn't let you. Oh, no. But if you would help me with that old trunk—”

Joanna strode up to her room and firmly went to bed. If Mrs. Roberts was interfering with the making of Rosalind Messenger's garden, she did not intend to know it that night. If Jones chose to work till midnight, he could. She was going to stretch out in the warm dusk and revel in her own dear home and watch the silver

moon come up over the hills: that was what she was there for. But she found the program hard to carry out. She presently caught herself explaining to McCurdy that she paid well for having her dishes washed, and that when she wanted an empty trunk moved, she moved it herself. She tried to turn away bodily from it all.

"My mind to me a kingdom isn't," she muttered. "Well, anyway, I believe we shall have a best seller on our autumn lists. If Curtis Webb is all right."

In the morning Joanna had to break it to the housekeeper that Rosalind was coming to stay over Sunday. It had seemed the simplest, most natural thing in the world to suggest when Rosalind said that she wanted

to oversee some planting, but was not ready yet to open her house; but telling it had suddenly become formidable. She managed an "Oh, by the way!" tone, calling the news down the stairs; but Mrs. Roberts stopped short in her tracks, frozen, appalled.

"Oh, what are we going to do!" she gasped.

"Why, feed her—very pleasantly and simply," Joanna urged with touching cheerfulness.

Mrs. Roberts set down the dishes she was carrying. The situation demanded clasped hands. "Oh, if the carpenters were out and everything weren't so confused, it wouldn't be so perfectly awful," she cried.

"Oh, come—it won't be awful;"

Joanna was good humor personified.

“She can call it camping.”

“Well, you will simply have to get a lot of things.” Mrs. Roberts had sunk against the wall. “There isn’t a decent-looking baking dish in the house, and the double boiler was ruined the day the water boiled out of it—you know, you kept me upstairs so long. And unless you expect me to wash dish towels every day—”

Joanna interrupted. “Why don’t you go down to the village this morning and buy what the house absolutely has to have?” It was shamelessly a bribe; Mrs. Roberts did love to make purchases, and the golden morning, pouring down the hills, was alluring. “I will make the beds and put the



house in order," Joanna weakly continued. She had meant to plan the vegetable garden and write for seeds, and putting it off was a bitter sacrifice; but her happiness scarcely counted.

Mrs. Roberts sighed mightily, then gathered up her dishes. "Very well, I shall. We can pull through some way," she said.

Joanna went on up-stairs on leaden feet. If only Rosalind would telegraph that she was not coming! "I need never ask any one again," she said, extinguishing the dream of years without a pang. Even dear guests in one's own dear home were not worth such an expenditure of tact.

Mrs. Roberts set out still martyred,

but two hours later she came running back triumphant.

"I have solved it!" she cried. "All will be well." She was breathless, but only from the hill; not a doubt marred her joy. "I met Mrs. Haggerty at the post-office, and she says she will come for the day tomorrow and Sunday. I will oversee the cooking, but she can do everything. Isn't that glorious?"

Joanna hated to sound sordid, yet she had to say it: "At three-fifty a day?"

"Well, of course, you have to pay for service!" Mrs. Roberts was disappointed in her. "I can take it out of my own money—"

Joanna could not allow that. She found herself almost apologizing.

Perhaps an atmosphere of pleasantness would be worth seven dollars, since it was only for this once.

"I thought you'd be delighted; but nothing I do is ever quite right, is it!" Mrs. Roberts observed, brightly.

"Funny, how they can cure you of any earthly desire," Joanna mused.

And yet a friend in her own house was rather sweet, that night. Rosalind was in the first stage of visiting, when the guest finds everything enchanting and would commit himself to an extra week if urged. Saturday she worked very hard up at her own place and came back tired to a house that was still in confusion, and that a drop in temperature had left rather chilly. The shavings had been brushed out and some of Joanna's

family furniture and rugs brought up from the cellar, but there was no luxurious couch, no bedroom fire, and it all seemed a little damp and bleak without the sun. Rosalind was still a well trained guest, appreciative and considerate, and Joanna could not have explained the drop in her own spirits, the vague sense of apology. Mrs. Haggerty, supervised by Mrs. Roberts, did admirably, and the housekeeper was so happy that, in Joanna's secret phrase, you wanted to hit her.

"Isn't it wonderful not to do those old dishes?" was the burden of her song. Rosalind had looked her over rather gravely, and had followed the inevitable, "Where's Mr.?" with a comment on the golden curls:

"A little too good to be true, aren't they?"

"She may touch it up," Joanna admitted; "but, Rosalind, some of our best friends do the same."

"They dye it dark," Rosalind expounded the social law. "Black or chestnut or auburn are perfectly permissible, and so is light brown; but blonde is vulgar. I would keep an eye on that young person."

In Jones she had not recognized their soldier of the road, and Joanna did not explain him.

Sunday it rained, a cold, beating, all-day storm. No planting was possible. Joanna was making a wood-box and could have furnished pleasant occupation of sandpapering and staining, but Rosalind did not like to

work with her hands. There were as yet no books in the house, no neighbors would drop in on them. And so the third stage of visiting was upon them both. As the day wore on, Rosalind's boredom was like a vapor, a visible poison spreading through the house. It took the savor out of their good luncheon, it magnified the afternoon to a very Sahara of time, arid and endless. There was nothing on earth to do! In town she and Joanna could fill their meetings with talk of plans; they stimulated each other, were sorry to separate; but out here under the pelting rain Rosalind was cut off from her own engrossing affairs, there was nothing she could put through or attend to, and she had not even the compensation of luxury,

which makes visiting the rich tolerable. She maintained her good manners, but suddenly with a start she realized that she must take the afternoon train.

Joanna was properly sorry even while she was hurrying to call a cab and help pack the bag. They were so profuse in their regret at the separation that they almost believed each other. Then the guest was gone, and out of the dim corners into which it had been driven the joy of home came rushing back. There were a hundred enchanting things to do! And nobody was on one's mind! In the kitchen the housekeeper and Mrs. Haggerty gossiped happily and kept warm, Jones was shut up for his adored hours of freedom—every one

under that roof was absorbed and content—hallelujah! It might rain outside, but within the sun had come out, so radiantly that Joanna was moved to a queer, cracked singing as she changed to a battered smock and got out her tools. When, hours later, Jones came in with a dazed, newly awakened look to know if she wanted anything, he found her seated on a floor strewn with shavings, hammering and chiseling, and as intent on turning the experience into knowledge as she was on fashioning her raw material into an article of use and beauty.

“Jones, how does one keep a guest happy?” she began.

He accepted the tacit invitation and sat down in the nearest chair.



"One doesn't, I imagine," he said.

"It's horrible, to visit."

"Every one hates it and every one does it." Joanna dropped her tools and clasped her arms about her knees for discussion. In every line she was still expressing freedom and relief; her shoulders moved caressingly against the ancient smock, her brow was beautiful with serenity. "I never could take much interest in chasing a ball, but sport would mitigate it a good deal, I suppose."

"I used to go because it meant meeting girls," Jones contributed.

"Yes—that, of course. But as one gets older—" Joanna shook a dubious head. "When your hostess says she is going to treat you like one of the family, it means just one thing:

there won't be any men asked in to dinner," she said sagely.

"You are so absorbed; I didn't suppose you knew whether there were men on earth or not." Jones was always ablaze with interest or else blank; there was no middle ground of half attention. "Now, Mrs. Roberts—"

"Yes. She finds them on every bush," she filled in his hesitation. "The very way she walks would show it—have you ever noticed? It is a beloved little trot. Watch her cross a room and you would know that some man adored her."

"And that she was working him for all there was in it," said Jones.

It was reprehensible, how Joanna loved a whack at Mrs. Roberts. She

positively glowed under it. "You can't say they don't like being worked," she said in common fairness.

"There's one born every minute." He shrugged away distastefully from that topic. "Didn't Mrs. Messenger like the house?"

"Yes; very much. But that couldn't fill the whole visit." One could be endlessly frank with Jones. "She nearly died to-day." Then she found her summary. "You must not ask very sophisticated guests, that's it. You must ask people who are awfully glad to run away from home for a rest, or who haven't any other way of getting into the country, or for whom you are sorry, one way or another. The poor things

—they are the only legitimate guests when you lead a little life in a little house.” A rueful smile followed. “I have been invited such a lot—was I a poor thing?”

“No!” Jones spoke vehemently. “You made the others glad they had come.”

She laughed. “I wonder! Well, I must go and pay Mrs. Haggerty. I have got seven dollars’ worth of experience out of it, anyway.” She rose, then lingered, fell on new topics. Human intercourse could be so pleasant! She felt a childish impulse to tell Jones to wait until she came back. At the door she paused again.

“Oh, I found out about Curtis Webb,” she said. “Mrs. Messenger knew—she always knows about peo-

ple. She has a Who's-Who mind. You remember, the writer I was wondering about," she explained as he said nothing. "The one who wrote *Windygoold*."

He stood turned to her, a dark outline against the rainy dusk. "I remember," he said.

"It was in the papers months ago," Joanna went on. "He reported some mighty deeds that he hadn't done—I suppose the literary imagination ran away with him. She had forgotten the details. He scraped through somehow—he wasn't condemned and wasn't quite cleared; but there were some hot letters in his defense afterward, from people who had known him, so perhaps it was unjust. That won't hurt the book—we

## JONES

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will publish it. I suppose the man meant it for a vindication—Windygoold's tall stories were always true."

"Oh—y—oo! Miss Maynard!" The housekeeper's voice was trilling through the house. "Mrs. Haggerty is leaving."

"I am coming," said Joanna.

When she returned, Jones had gone, and suddenly the little house was dark and chilly; the pouring pleasantness of the afternoon had been turned off. She was tired, and glad that she must go back to town in the morning.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TEMPERAMENTAL HELP

"MISS MAYNARD—oh, Miss Maynard!" Jones was rushing up the hill with the lifted face of despair, his long arms clutching at heaven for help, his single-track mind utterly filled with disaster. Joanna went to the veranda railing to hear, but she did not look alarmed. Her father's olive-gray eyes were almost suspiciously grave under her mother's broad and lovely brow.

"What's the matter, Jones?" she asked.

"Miss Maynard—my God, the beans!" He was dangerously short

of breath. "I have ruined them. I've planted every blamed one upside down!"

"But how could you? What do you mean? Are they up?"

He motioned her to come and see. "There is no imbecile thing I couldn't do. You ought not to trust me with anything." He was striding ahead of her. "I was not down here yesterday nor the day before because of the rain; and now look!"

He stood over the neat oblong of cultivated ground that had been the pride of their hearts, a vegetable garden laid out according to book and catalogue, rows ruled meticulously straight with taut string. Through the soaked earth the bright green lines were pushing, and, sure enough,



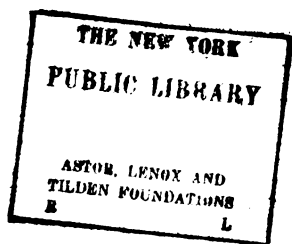
every little inch-high bean stalk carried on its head the burst seed of its origin. Joanna studied them amazedly.

"They do seem to have gone into reverse," she admitted.

"How could I know they must be aimed right?" Jones was outraged. "The package only said four times the depth of the seed or something like that. I would take them all up and put them in properly if I thought it would be any use." They bent down to try it, but the result was not encouraging. Neither end of the bean seemed fitted to face the world. "It is too late to put in a new crop." Jones gave the earth an unhappy kick. "You are so angelically patient about everything—"



"The package only said four times the depth of the seed or something like that. I would take them all up and put them in properly if I thought it would be any use." They bent down to try it, but the result was not encouraging.



"Jonsey!" She only called him that when she had a real inspiration. "You could not have got them all in wrong. Some would just naturally have fallen right."

"Not with me," he muttered, but there was a dark gleam of hope.

"They couldn't have helped it. I will bet that is the way they always come up!" She was triumphant, ready to laugh now, and the distress was magically gone from the boyish face, the clenched hands relaxed.

"Silly way to grow," he observed. "We can ask the Messengers' gardener about it when he comes down this evening."

Joanna straightened up from the beans with a frown. "Is McCurdy here every night?"

"Oh, well, they go to the movies." Jones was not going to talk about that. "Do you think our corn looks right?"

"They said to plant it in hills." Joanna studied dubiously the long neat ridges they had built for the corn. "If those aren't hills, what are?"

"They don't look convincing, someway."

"Ask McCurdy," she advised. "We ought not to have tied up the lettuces with that old ribbon, I'm afraid. The rain has made it run all over the outside leaves. Jones—they look rather awful!"

The lettuces did look queer. Joanna had bought good-sized plants, and, dreaming of crisp white centers, had tied them tightly round the mid-

dle with some discarded yellow ribbon. The effect had been charming before the long storm; now the outside leaves were streaked with yellow and looked strangely dead. She felt one with inquiring hand; it collapsed, an empty shell, and from the place of the cherished heart came an indescribable slime.

"Curious!" muttered Joanna.

Jones tested the next with his foot, and then the next. All down the row the result was the same: weeks of salad lay in ruins. They had to draw back from the released foulness.

"It looks like the Evil Eye," said Jones.

"Perhaps they have turned out skunk cabbage; I have heard of that," Joanna offered.

He took up the spade and gave the more than dead lettuces decent burial.

"I'm afraid it was the ribbons and the rain. Don't you suppose that—tied up so tight—the rain ran in and couldn't get out?"

"But tying up lettuce was the one gardening fact that I knew;" she was indignant. "I never heard anything about drainage for them. Lettuce is some ninety per cent. water, anyway; I don't see why they minded it." She turned away from her lost salad with a sigh. "I never knew before that vegetables were so temperamental. Do you think the onions ought to sit on top of the earth like that?"

Jones had their guide in his pocket. They sat on the bank together and

read absorbedly. Their questions would have made the author roll on the ground, but their intense interest, their abject faith in his word, must have flattered. Summer buzzed and twittered an accompaniment to the enchanting pursuit. The two took their happiness in very much the same way—as children do, or as Adam and Eve might have. And Jones could be exquisitely happy when he was not swamped in passionate woe. Their horticultural plans grew before them. They saw visions of grape arbors, trellises of roses. Jones had an inspiration for buying second-hand windows and making them into cold frames.

“Then we could have vegetables twice as early, next year,” he said,



gloating over a violent display of early tomatoes.

Joanna looked up from the book, startled, troubled. "But next year you won't be working for your board," she said gently. "You are hardly lame at all now. In the autumn you will be going back to your career."

Any mention of the world outside the sheltered garden put out the sun for Jones. His head dropped between his hands. Joanna's kind heart had always hurried her away from the topic, but lately instinct had been telling her that the truth was very near the surface. She waited a long moment, then helped him with a question.

"You have never told me what

your work is. You are writing now, of course. Any one can see that. What did you do before?"

"Newspaper work: dramatic criticism, review of the season's books—that sort of thing."

"Why didn't you go back to it?"

"I didn't want to see people I knew. Didn't want to have to talk."

"Are you ready to tell me why?" She asked it sensibly, with no visible emotion, and the tense body beside her visibly relaxed.

"Yes; I must. You have been so heavenly good to me; it's healing, just being near you. These hours are so precious—I've hated even to think of ugly things when I was with you. What have you thought—that I was a criminal in hiding?"

“No.”

The tranquil word slipped into his heart like a key. His fists came down vehemently on his knees.

“Suppose you had done well by your country—well! And they said you had done ill and disgraced you for it?”

Her imagination went the whole way to the depths of such an experience before she answered. “Oh, I should lie down and die of it! But, after all, to have done well—that is the big thing.”

His hand, feverish, shaken, closed about hers. “They didn’t believe me, Joanna. They said I lied. I told them God’s truth and they said I lied.”

“And then what did you do?”

"Do? What could I do? Nothing. And before I had a chance to make them see—ram it down their throats—do again just what I said I had done, I made a bad landing, smashed my machine and my leg. And they said I did that on purpose."

"No! Oh, *no*." She could not quite bear it.

"Oh, they didn't say it to me. They looked it and kept still. Some of it was my fault. I got in wrong with the flight commander at the very first. But you can't discipline air men as you can ground fighters! It's a different thing, Joanna. He wanted to be a marinet—cheap little cock he was. And I told him what I thought of him."

"Ah, my child!"

"I know! But listen. We were out flying in formation when I saw a Boche plane, and I went after it—my God, weren't we over there to go after them? He could have disciplined me for leaving the patrol, put me on the ground for several days. That's bad enough. But what he did was to say there wasn't any Boche plane—that I had lost my nerve and sneaked home. I couldn't prove it, but I let him have a few home truths, and after that he hated me and discredited me every chance he got."

"I didn't know men were like that," said Joanna.

"Everybody's like that—except you." His hand tightened on hers.

"We had several other rows. I was

insubordinate—I grant that. But I was not a coward or a liar! And then I was out alone one day, and a Fokker came down on my tail, and two others joined in the fun, and I got all three—blind luck, my dear! The first man's machine gun jammed, so I got him, and the other two smashed into each other and went down together. I flew back drunk with joy to report, and that damned fish smiled under his damned little mustache and warned me not to say too much about it until it had been verified. He sent a man out, and the report came back that there were no three wrecked planes anywhere in the sector."

Joanna was breathing as though she had been running. "What had happened?"

“I had made a mistake in the place—I was new at reading my map. I went out the next day to find them, but engine trouble drove me back, and I was so sick and mad that I made a bad landing—that, you see, was to get out of being court-martialed. As soon as I could sit up I tried to get an investigation, but the fellow had been killed and the squadron broken up and scattered, and no charges had been made—I couldn’t do anything but lie there in a plaster cast and curse life. I never got back into the air—they put me on ground work. My chance was gone.”

“Couldn’t any one help, there at the hospital?” Joanna was angry at the nurses and doctors and all who had let the sick soul go unhealed.

"I don't know. I never spoke to any one, there or afterward. I had almost forgotten what human speech was when you came down like an angel out of Heaven. Do I seem to you like a liar?"

Her wrath burst out. "Only a fool could call you a liar!"

"Well, it got into the papers and my sister wrote for 'my version.' She said she was sure I hadn't done 'anything worse than exaggerate.' And she has known me all my life." He was showing her the inmost hurt, the thing that till now could not have been spoken. "She is all the family I have. I didn't answer—I have never sent her a line since."

Joanna could have laid violent hands on that sister. "Why, you



are almost too true—you tell the truth the way little boys do, when one wishes they wouldn't. You never pretend anything. That is one reason you got into trouble—if you don't like or admire any one, you show it in every line of your body. It's a bad thing, Jonsey, to be as true as you are. I adore it, but the world doesn't understand."

"I wish there was a world with only you and me in it," he began impetuously, then broke off, drawing away from her with an impatient mutter. Up the path from the village came first a caroling voice, then a blithe presence in shining white.

"'And the little cap was——on——his——head!'" Mrs. Roberts was singing with arch and delicate drama.

"Oh, hello, people!" She brought her purchases to show them. Hurt and shaken, they were called on to admire a ducky piece of pink and white organdie and a bargain in silk stockings as well as an adorable little enameled saucepan for the house. Joanna did her best, but Jones rose and strode away.

"Mr. Jones is a moody person, don't you think?" Mrs. Roberts observed. "I don't believe in being moody, do you? I think every one ought to be cheerful."

"It is a great gift," said Joanna politely.

"It is not always a gift!" Mrs. Roberts settled down on the bank beside her. "Sometimes you have to hold on to it like grim death. Off

alone like this, working fourteen hours a day, when you once had everything and didn't so much as run the ribbons into your own undies—any one would feel it, don't you think?"

"When have you worked fourteen hours a day?" Joanna was trying hard not to hate her.

A trill of laughter answered. "Oh, Miss Maynard! You have no conception of all there is to do in that house!"

"But isn't that partly because you leave it all until the day I come?" Joanna had been longing for weeks to say that, but could never before achieve the right tone—reasonable, detached, pleasant. "If you did a certain amount every day, you

wouldn't have to work fourteen hours on Thursday."

Mrs. Roberts had a wide fixed smile. "Nothing I do really suits you, does it? I try and try, but of course I always know that I am not pleasing you."

And so Joanna had to placate and reassure. All that day she had to cheer the housekeeper and praise her work. Mrs. Roberts accepted comfort with chilly politeness and worked obviously, touchingly hard. After dinner she came apologetically to say: "Do you mind very much if I go to the movies with a friend? If there is anything more you want done, I can do it when I come back. It takes me out of myself, don't you know?—makes me forget."

“Oh, certainly—do go,” Joanna urged. A few moments later a light step passed under the window, accompanied by a heavy tread, and a broad beautiful peace descended on Joanna’s house. It was lovely throughout. She wandered from room to room in the summer dusk, taking back to her heart the home that had been alienated all day. When she came to the veranda, she found Jones waiting for her, and welcomed him as part of the pleasantness. They had not been alone together since the revelations in the vegetable garden, and the memory was in their meeting eyes, but Joanna was not going to talk of sad things.

“Oh, Jonsey, if only the house would clean itself and feed us, how

amazingly beautiful life could be!" she sighed, sinking down in a deep chair.

Jones hooked himself over the railing and gave the matter sober thought.

"Well, I could feed us," he said. "I can cook."

"Dishes," said Joanna.

"Wooden plates, paper doilies; you could burn up most of them."

She thought that over. "It would mean taking food the way the animals do, as a bodily necessity, not a social event. That is the trouble now, of course: we make it a party. We deck it out. We dress for it."

"Do you enjoy it?" Jones asked.

"My meals? With Mrs. Roberts?" Joanna's voice had risen to a

cry. "A tramp's sandwich under a hedge would feel happier. I don't care about formal meals, the kind you have to give a man. The receipts in the magazines fill me with horror—three hours' preparation for ten minutes' worth of gratification. Who was it said that a woman's ideal meal was a poached egg on a chair?"

"I don't have to have large male meals," Jones suggested. "And with what you pay a housekeeper—"

"And what she spends in the village," Joanna put in.

"You could buy whatever you wanted."

"The steaks of our childhood, half a foot thick. Weren't they good! Jones! Let's talk about this seriously."

"I'm serious," he assured her.

"Suppose luncheon were sandwiches and milk and fruit and cheese and things, no cooking and no dishes," she tried it out. "Breakfast isn't anything: cereal in a fireless cooker and coffee. Meat and vegetables once a day, but no social event about it, no table setting—take your plateful and get more if you want it. Nothing horrid or messy but not one frill. The 'pleasures of the table' gone—but, O Lord, the servant problem gone! Would that one meal be a great burden?"

Jones had an inspiration. "Build a stone fireplace down by the brook, broil chops and steaks and bacon there, roast corn—wasn't that fun, the night we did it?—and easy?"



Joanna straightened up. "Oh, let us go down and build it right away!" she cried. Then a fresh difficulty dropped her back again. "Cleaning," she said.

"There isn't much dirt, out here in the country;" Jones offered that dubiously, knowing it inadequate.

"No; very little. But the house must be sweet and clean from top to bottom. That isn't a social frill, a party; it is the root of all charm. My house would feel squalid if it weren't clean."

Jones was out of his depths and wisely kept silent. Presently Joanna had her inspiration there.

"Mrs. Haggerty the day I come down, a great cleaning and some cooking done. Mops, vacuum clean-

ers, everything that makes work quick and easy. Of course, even then it would be a trouble—but compared to keeping the housekeeper cheered while she does it!”

They were beginning to look at each other with excited eyes. “I have camped a lot. I know all sorts of dodges,” Jones explained. “I think we could have fun even out of the trouble.”

“Summer camping—that’s it,” cried Joanna. “A dear comfortable house to live in and work over and make perfect, and camping for meals. We could—” Then she broke off, lifting a warning hand. There were voices at the front door, steps in the living-room. The joy was wiped from her face. “That is why we

can't do it—other people," she said, and went to greet the Messengers.

Mrs. Roberts was late in getting home that night and Joanna lay awake listening for her. She knew McCurdy, a sober, literal, four-square young Scotch American, in no way above his station. That he should be referred to as "a friend" was disturbing. Joanna was purely and perfectly a democrat where outer distinctions were concerned. People like Rosalind or the chief held fixed places in the firmament and were never separated from their background, but Joanna moved erratically across space, a solitary individual; she had got at least that from her mother. But in the inner distinctions of the spirit she held immovably

to her class, and to dazzle a plebeian heart was in her eyes an offense. When she heard a ripple of smothered laughter below, she arose and opened her bedroom door.

She had to wait some time; sounds and lights indicated refreshments in the kitchen. By the time the step was on the stairs, a craven longing to shut her eyes had nearly defeated her first intention of plain speech. She made a very mild beginning.

"Was it a good show?" she asked from the darkness.

"Oh, splendid!" Mrs. Roberts paused in the doorway, always happy to talk, the day's grievance forgotten, and gave her the plot. "It was such a darling night that we came home the long way," she concluded.

"I shouldn't think that McCurdy would be a very satisfactory companion;" Joanna was working round to it, her heart thumping dismally at the necessity.

Mrs. Roberts saw her direction and was instantly defensive.

"What can you do, off alone in the wilds like this?" she asked plaintively. "You have to have some one to play with or you'll die."

"But to play with a laborer—" Joanna was gently hesitant, but the criticism was out.

"I find Mr. McCurdy quite as interesting as Mr. Jones;" Mrs. Roberts spoke incisively. "He has vastly better manners. I have never been to the movies with Mr. Jones, and of course you have, but I can't

imagine doing anything pleasant with him. And Mr. McCurdy wouldn't dream of—oh, holding hands, don't you know?"

Joanna did know, and her face flamed in the darkness. It horrified her that that revealing hour by the vegetable garden could be called anything so vulgar as "holding hands." She did not speak, and Mrs. Roberts, turning to go, fired another shot over her shoulder. "I really think a gardener is as good as a hired man under an assumed name—for Jones isn't the initial on his cuff links. But I suppose you know all about that." She closed her door with a vicious little bang, but Joanna shut hers furtively, without sound. Jones had not told her everything, then.

"Little cat—I'd like to send her packing," she stormed, very much like the "rudimentary female" of her mother's scorn.

In the morning Mrs. Roberts was brightly cool, fixedly smiling over deep offense. Joanna had been asked to go off motoring for the day with the Messengers and had accepted reluctantly, hating to leave the dear place where there was so much to be done, but this morning she would have accepted anything that meant escape from home.

The Theodore Bartons, neighbors from an Italian villa higher up in the hills, went with them, and all day the talk kept returning to the domestic situation. It was the unflagging joke, the source of all stories. The

cook who had put up the luncheon might not be there when they came back for dinner. Mrs. Barton's stately mother, suggesting to a new treasure that "her servants always rose when she came into the kitchen," had been firmly told by a seated amazon that "that wasn't done any more"—outrageous or funny or food for serious reflection, according to the hearer. Various friends had closed their summer houses and gone to hotels because no maids would stay so far from the movies. In one house the whole staff had left because there was serious illness in the family. No one tried to place the blame, to interpret the situation in the light of the times or to find a solution. To groan and to laugh about it seemed the only reactions.



"Joanna is in luck," Rosalind said. "She doesn't have any of this trouble. Perhaps it is what we are all coming to—the near-lady instead of the Biddy."

"Oh, don't!" burst from Joanna so fervently that they shouted.

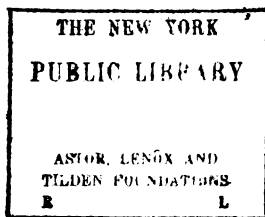
"So airy, fairy Lilian has her faults, too," observed Rosalind. "Oh, for the good old days of slaves!"

Rosalind's cook was still at her post when they returned and she kept them all for dinner. It was very late when Joanna, sunburned, sleepy, at peace, came through her gate.

The house was dark, but Jones was waiting for her on the steps. He came quickly, protectively, to meet her, and in the clear moonlight she could see that his face was harassed.



Mrs. Barton's stately mother, suggesting to a new treasure that "her servants always rose when she came into the kitchen," had been firmly told by a seated amazon that "that wasn't done any more."



“Trouble, Jonsey?” she asked comfortably, and seated herself on the step to hear.

“I think I ought to tell you, though I hate to.” He stood before her with arms tightly folded; under them she could see the nervous twitch of his hands. “I was in the vegetable garden this evening, wondering what we could do about the corn. McCurdy says that hills are simply holes; it sounds silly, but it’s true.”

“All those mountain ranges for nothing,” Joanna sighed. “Go on.”

“Well, pretty soon I heard voices passing along the path to the village—Mrs. Roberts’ gushing and squealing and a man’s voice. I didn’t even look up—I wasn’t interested. But when they got into the birches down

there, the voices stopped so suddenly that I—wondered.”

“Well?”

He scowled his distaste. “The moon was just up and I could see—enough. She was—you can guess.”

“In his arms?”

“Very much so. Then they went on. They haven’t come back.”

Joanna had winced bodily. “McCurdy?”

“I don’t know. It was about the time that he usually comes. But I didn’t see.”

“Did any other man visit her?”

“I don’t think so. Not in the evening.”

Joanna’s foot kicked at the step as though she thrust away something abominable. “Impossible!

She couldn't. He is not a rough diamond—he's a common working man. What could she see in him?"

Jones was not going to discuss with Joanna what Mrs. Roberts might see. "Did Mr. Roberts die?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. She told me, but I wasn't listening. She has often spoken of him, but I never listened in time." She was impatient of her dreamy self. "Now don't ask me if I looked up references, because I didn't. I would have taken an escaped convict by that time."

"Perhaps you did," said Jones.

"What!"

She was so astonished that he weakened. "Oh, well, one had to wonder what she was doing off here unless she was lying low."

“Working for her living, man! Why not?”

“Women like that don’t need to work. There is always some poor sucker to work for them.”

Joanna studied him with an amused gleam in her eyes. “Did she try to charm you, Jonsey?”

“Not more than once!”

“Unchivalrous generation! Once she’d have been any man’s ideal.”

Jones had no attention to spare for the ideals of the past. “She ought to be home,” he said, looking at his watch.

“Oh, and I shall have to have it out with her!” Joanna sighed. The night was warm, the moon-silvered world lovely, but the ugly task ahead spoiled everything. They waited in

depressed silence. Twelve o'clock, striking in the village, gave Joanna a startled idea. She rose.

"And all this time she is up in her room sound asleep," she announced. "She came in the other way without your seeing her, that's all. We are intelligent!"

Jones doubted it, but she was so sure it was true that she was smiling to herself as she hurried up-stairs. Mrs. Roberts' door was ajar and she pushed it back with infinite caution.

The moonlight showed an empty bed. It also showed a cleared bureau and through an open door a starkly bare closet. Joanna jerked open empty drawers. Then she went amazedly back to the stairs where Jones waited.



"She has gone, bag and baggage," she announced. She was prepared to sit down there and talk it over, but Jones bolted for the dining-room. A moment later he was rushing back with the familiar lifted arms of despair.

"The silver—my God, Miss Maynard, it's gone with her!"

They turned on all the lights, looked and looked again. The fine old family silver, her grandmother's tea-set, inherited trays and platters—all had been taken.

"And I let her—let her loot the place under my very eyes!" Jones had both hands at his hair. "Oh, I ought to be killed! I will get it back for you—I swear it!"

Joanna was still looking dazedly at

the empty spaces. "I can't seem to believe it," she stammered. "I knew she wasn't very—sensible; and that she touched up her hair; but to steal! Why, Jones, people you know personally don't steal."

"Depends on whom you know," Jones said darkly. "I never trusted her, but I hadn't sense enough to listen to my own instincts. If I had, I'd have sat on the silver from the moment you left the house."

"But how did the trunk get out without your—"

"I wasn't here. I went off about four o'clock, and it was on my way back that I stopped in the vegetable garden and saw—that."

"You were not here for dinner?"

Jones looked embarrassed. "Oh, I

get dinner in the village when you are not here, as a general thing. It's—simpler."

Joanna frowned her impatience, but there was not time to be angry about that now. "Do you suppose McCurdy is in on it?"

"Some man is! Was there any money about?"

Joanna had left a purse containing forty dollars in a drawer of the desk. That too was gone. Jones, buttoning his coat about him, wanted to set out at once in pursuit. She had a hard time convincing him that as the telegraph office would be closed and no trains running, nothing could be done before morning. She would not even let him go after McCurdy.

"If he is there he is innocent, and if he is gone we can't get him to—

night," she insisted. "One thing certain—she was not any one's tool. It was the man who tooled, in that partnership. I paid her Thursday; she loses two days' wages, anyway."

"Lazy — she didn't earn her board;" the truth came with a relieved rush. "You won't find a clean pot or pan in your kitchen. If the oatmeal or something stuck a little, at first she used to sigh and moan and massage her exhausted hands, thinking I would say, 'Oh, please let me do it!' When she found that didn't work, she used to put them away stuck, and yodel. She didn't care!"

They were facing each other across the dining table, leaning heavily on their elbows. "But what made her come?" Joanna marveled.

"Waiting till her man got out of jail, perhaps. She didn't do so badly, either. I never did trust her."

"And Mrs. Messenger didn't," Joanna admitted. "I seem to have been the only gullible one. I can't yet believe that she was the thief. Why, one day a humming-bird flew in through the window and she took any amount of trouble to help it find the way out. She was just as glad as I was when the little thing was free. That doesn't sound like a crook."

She had made him smile. "My dear girl, you have seen crooks only in the movies, where they are on the job night and day. But they are people, you know—human beings."

She nodded slow acceptance of the surprising fact. "I suppose that is

true. And when they stop crooking, they may gather wild flowers and pet the cat just like anybody. Oh, I wish I could understand!"

"What?"

"How she explains it, what she thinks of herself when she is alone in her room with the door shut. To be trusted with precious things, things that can't be replaced, and then— But she doesn't admit in words, 'I'm a low-down thief,' does she?"

"She probably says, 'I'm the slick-est little Jane in the profesh.'"

Joanna would not accept that. "No. Her speech was always rather proper—much more so than mine. When I swore, I shocked her half to death. Why, she was not of the underworld. It's ridiculous."

"The things are gone."

"I know. Even my great-aunt's soup ladle, that came through the Chicago fire. And my baby fork and spoon and my silver cup—ah, it was mean to take that!" And Joanna's voice had a grieved break.

One could not suffer in Jones' sight; it made him suffer so much worse. His heart visibly broke, and she had to laugh and scold him before he could be comforted.

"We will get everything back and wring her neck," she assured him, rising. "And it is so interesting—I have never been more interested in my life than I have this past hour. I could stay up all night talking about it. I didn't dream that crime was so thrilling. If I were not a publisher,

I would turn detective; I don't believe they ever know a dull minute. Good night, Jonsey," she added from the stairs. "Don't suffer and don't stay up. That doesn't accomplish anything."

Jones felt that he must stay on guard. Nothing less would appease his burdened soul. He was sedulously locking the windows when his name was called from above. Joanna, very grave but for wicked eyes, was coming down with an open letter in her hand.

"They always leave a note on one's bureau; we might have thought of that. Read it," she said, and dropped it to him.

"My dear Miss Maynard," Mrs. Roberts had written; "We are not



making a success of it, do you think? Oh, I have tried so hard! But you really must employ two strong trained women to do all that you expect done. I felt so discouraged this afternoon that I called up Mr. Roberts at his office in the city. He was crazy to have me back. I did not explain to you the whole situation, but if you will look back, you will see that I did not tell you any fibs. You probably thought that it had all happened long ago, but as a matter of fact it was the very day I came to you. I called you up from my own house. Mr. Roberts has been making a lot of money lately and he is going to give me a good allowance, so that we need not get all cross and fussed up about money. Men can't understand that women's clothes and little things are expensive, so I think it is best not to discuss it with them, don't you? Mr. Roberts had been trying everywhere to find me, so he came rushing out on the late train, and he won't hear of my staying another hour. A man

hates to have you do hard labor, don't you think? My leaving has made him really appreciate me, so, after all, these weeks have not been wholly wasted. I am sorry to leave you like this, but almost anybody you get will suit you better than I have. And if you do the work yourself for a day or two, I think you will be less critical of poor little me. I heard one of your callers say with horror that a kitchen maid had asked seventy-five dollars a month. *It is not half enough for such work.*

"I hate to leave the house alone with that man who calls himself Jones. Just to have an assumed name makes a person seem crooked, don't you think? Even if you didn't feel a personal distrust of him. So I am putting the silver in the laundry basket in your bathroom and your purse in the shoebag under the Chinese slippers. You may know why Mr. Jones is hiding here, but I don't want to feel responsible if anything is gone.

## JOANNA BUILDS A NEST

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“With best wishes, and hoping that you will find some one a *great deal* more satisfactory than I was,

“Sincerely yours,

“ARLINE ROBERTS.”

Jones read to the end and between wrath and relief could produce nothing but a stammer.

“The loot is all there, in the laundry basket and the shoe-bag;” the words fell coolly on his hot confusion. “These instincts of ours are wonderful guides, don’t you think? Good night—*Jones*.” And then, with the door shut on him, Joanna laughed till she sobbed.

“And I shall never know what she told me about Mr. Roberts,” was her last waking thought that night.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MATE

JOANNA slept far into Sunday morning, lapped in mellow peace. When at last she woke up, she was smiling deeply before she knew why. Outside her windows was a magic day—summer at the flood; a day to be celebrated. Cold water was a living joy that started her cracked singing. When she came down-stairs, Jones had gone to the post-office, open for a Sunday hour, but breakfast simmered on the stove, the house was freshly brushed and garnished. It looked as though he had not been to bed at all, so much had been done.

Joanna could not stare enough. Oh, the unutterable loveliness of home without an alien presence! Inspiration set in with a rush. New possibilities were revealed, changes that would make for more charm and more comfort. For Joanna perfection was always just ahead. She was wandering about with the yardstick in one hand, her coffee cup in the other, brooding, lost to this world, when a note of amusement brought her back with a shock. In the open front door stood the chief, drawing off his motoring gloves.

“I came, you see,” he announced.

After all, she was glad to see him, very glad. He had a way of looking on at her, like a contented spectator in a good seat, that was stimulat-

ing. He was very kind and polite about her nest-building, and if he saw the limited little house that it was rather than the miracle that had been wrought, she was too exalted to know it. She showed him the vegetable garden, too—another miracle, considering how late it had been started—and there caught his eye wandering.

“I suppose they do look like any vegetables to you,” she said surprisedly. “Why, I remember—Rosalind Messenger used to bore me to desperation, making me look at her vegetable garden. It never occurred to me that mine could feel like that!”

“It is good to see you so happy,” said the chief, and glanced at his watch.

So she led him back to the veranda and gave him the laugh he had come for with her tale of the housekeeper. She had meant to keep Jones out of it—for no tangible reason—but at the climax his name slipped in.

“I suppose Jones is your slightly wounded soldier;” the chief showed a tried patience for Joanna’s experiments, his method of enjoying them. “Anything queer about him?”

She did not want the chief to enjoy Jones. She might laugh at him herself, but no one else should. So she diverted the conversation to the making of books, a topic that never failed them. He had brought proofs of the autumn catalogue, and as they turned the pages together, it was

visible that Sunday and recreation held for him nothing that could compare with Monday and the office.

"I have given *Windygoold* a page to itself," he explained, dwelling on the details as Joanna had dwelt on her individual carrots. "It is a good book. It ought to sell. Did you see this picture of Curtis Webb? He is—My dear Miss Maynard!" he broke off in alarm.

Joanna had risen with a silent shriek—a mighty intake of breath clamped back by a convulsive hand.

"What is it?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, nothing—I remembered something—it isn't anything;" and she dropped down with a shaken laugh. "Let me see Curtis Webb again," she added, putting out a limp hand.



Of course, any one but Joanna would have guessed it long ago. The photograph showed him several years younger, but it was unmistakably Jonsey. The intense little eyes looked out from under a drooping brow just as his did, the arms were tightly folded across his chest as though to keep the nervous hands still. The more she looked, the worse her inner agitation grew. She was righteously indignant and insanely glad and above everything she did not want the chief to know. She plunged ahead with the catalogue, talking a torrent, pouring out vitality, working on him like the desperate mother-bird who lures the hunter away from the nest. Never in her life had she so exerted herself for man, and the

effect was immediate, astonishing: the chief quickened, settled down to stay till the last possible moment, laughed from new depths. Joanna played her game over suppressed laughter—and she nearly shrieked again when she saw Jones standing at a frozen pause in the doorway.

“Oh—mail—just leave it inside;” she tossed the order obliviously with a dismissing gesture and sank back in exhausted relief as Jones vanished. The chief had not looked up in time.

He was mercifully going on to lunch at the Theodore Bartons' and so at last he took a reluctant leave. A few weeks before Joanna would have been thrilled to have him lingering at her gate, patently open to an invitation for the afternoon, but now her

one thought was to be rid of him. Released, she went back to the house with the strong step of one who means to have it out on the spot.

Jones was at the cellar door, drearily splitting kindling. At her, "Well, Curtis Webb!" he looked up without surprise, and she saw in his eyes the lost soul of their first meeting.

"I meant to tell you to-day," he said.

"Why didn't you tell me the day you saw me reading your story?" she demanded.

He was hopelessly remote. "Reading my story?" he repeated without understanding.

"*Windygoold*, on the veranda. And I told you how good it was."

“Oh, yes. Why didn’t I what? Oh, tell you.” It was almost too much trouble; speech had to be dragged up. “You are so kind. I didn’t want to put any of the burden on you—make you stand up for me—all that. I meant to sink or swim by the book. If it doesn’t clean up my name, then—” his gesture indicated that his name could go. He was curiously passionless, considering how bitter he had shown himself.

“But why did you take to taxi driving when you might have been writing?”

He had to drag his memory for the reason. “No—after *Windygoold* I couldn’t write. It seemed to be all gone—I thought it was never coming back. Then you were kind and I

found it again." It evidently was immaterial whether he wrote or not. She studied the drooping figure with the beginning of a smile.

"Did I hurt your feelings this morning, Jonsey, hustling you off? That was your publisher and your picture lay on the table before us. It didn't seem just the moment for an introduction, did it?"

She had not found the explanation. Jones picked up the kindling as though publishers and snubs were alike indifferent to him.

"Oh, that didn't matter," he said, turning away.

Nothing could be done for him, no friendliness could reach him in the abode of the condemned. All he asked was to accept his dark lot in

silence and work his hands to the bone for her. He would have no lunch. That afternoon she heard him in the vegetable garden, toiling under a hot sun.

“The help seems to be as temperamental as the lettuce,” she sighed, furtively watching him from behind an up-stairs curtain. Dear, queer, long, crazy boy! Gifted and unhappy and undisciplined, yet unutterably sweet when he was good; desperately in need of tenderness and understanding; perfect comrade for uncounted hours. *Jonsey!* Her heart moved and swelled in her side so strangely that she put a frightened hand over it. And then on a sobbing breath the truth came and her drowned eyes were looking on a new-born love.

Hours later Joanna went tumultuously up the hill in search of Rosalind. She found her just returned from a luncheon, too fine to enjoy life, yet reluctant to change, inspecting a blight on her roses from a careful distance. Rosalind counted that hour lost in which something was not accomplished and anything less than perfection was to her failure. Her place, within and without, was so exquisitely ordered that Joanna had once told her it looked "lonesome." Rosalind, seriously considering the criticism, had tried to introduce a little careful irregularity—a cushion on the floor, rose petals on the gravel; but she had never really liked it. Seeing Joanna cut across the lawn, she called a good-humored reprimand.

“The path doesn’t take sixty seconds longer!”

Joanna turned to the path with blind docility, stepping on a bed of pansies to reach it. Rosalind sighed, then, seeing her friend’s face, forgot the pansies.

“What is the matter?” she demanded.

The rose garden had a marble seat looking off down the valley and they dropped down there while Joanna got back her breath.

“I must talk to some one,” she burst out. “It is so—preposterous. I give you my word the thought never crossed my mind until to-day. And yet—there it is!”

A smile of understanding was growing behind Rosalind’s gravity.



“Well, why shouldn’t it be there?” she asked. “Why isn’t it a good thing?”

Joanna’s head jerked up. “You have—seen it?”

“Suspected it—certainly.”

“And you don’t think it is perfectly crazy?”

“I, certainly don’t. I think it would be splendid.”

Joanna’s astonishment groped for words. “But I came to you for common sense, for what the world would think. To get back my balance! And here you are encouraging me!”

Rosalind considered that, then gave a nod of assent. “Why not? I don’t consider that marriage necessarily means happiness, but I know

there is no happiness until you have tried it."

"But I have been happy," said Joanna feebly.

"Because you believed it was coming, around the next corner, perhaps. Cut off the possibility and then see how you like it."

Joanna made a mental attempt and shivered. "Ah, he is such a dear, Rosalind!" she cried. "His heart is so big, so true. It would never fail you."

"And he is so distinguished looking," said Rosalind.

Joanna was surprised, then saw it with a mighty glow that put her hand over Rosalind's. "He looks like Somebody, doesn't he! He really has a great gift, and it is written on

him. It was clever of you to have seen that."

"And it is suitable. He will give you a very good position, Joanna."

She had to cover her eyes. "I thought I should have to fight for him, that others wouldn't know the beauty of him," she muttered. "Oh, you make me so glad! I told you once that if a man fell in love with me, there was always something the matter with him. You remember?"

"Not much the matter this time," was the complacent answer.

"Then you don't think it important that he is younger than I am?"

"Younger than you are!" Rosalind was aghast. "My dear, he is not. He must be nearly forty."

Fear rose between them, pushing them apart on the bench.

"Three years younger," said Joanna. "Jones is just thirty."

"Jones!" The worst had happened. Rosalind was looking all the dismay that Joanna had foreseen.

"But he is not Jones," she said miserably. "He is Curtis Webb, the writer. I forgot that you didn't know that."

No other name could make him more acceptable to Rosalind. "I thought it was the chief," she said in outraged protest. "I supposed for once in your life you were going to do the sane and sensible thing. I ought to have known you better."

Joanna was crushed. "Oh, but not the chief!"

"Why not? I lunched with him to-day at the Bartons' and when I

spoke of you—oh, I saw it, Joanna! How can you be such a fool?”

Joanna had a vision of the chief politely commending her inspirations with a private glance at his watch. “But it would be so dull,” she faltered. “We have only the shop in common. He doesn’t enjoy—oh, making mud pies.”

“He would not make a mud pie of your life,” was the strong answer. “This rude queer youth—no money, no presence—Curtis Webb? What was that story about him at the front?”

Joanna rose. “Ah, well, we can’t talk about it,” she said sorrowfully. “There is no stain on his honor—take my word for that.”

Rosalind followed her down the

hill. "I have only meant to help you, Joanna. I had to be frank."

"I know."

"You won't do anything immediate, will you?"

"Oh, no. Why, I haven't been asked to do anything at all," Joanna added in startled candor.

Rosalind found no comfort in that. "You will be—" she stopped, visibly swallowing harsh comment. "You are not going to let him stay on there just with you and Mrs. Roberts?"

It was the moment to tell about the departure of the housekeeper, but Joanna quailed before fresh warnings. She knew herself that she must not stay alone in her house with Curtis Webb. She would go to town that night and bring back some

dreary old dragon on Thursday, but it was a concession to stupid and vulgar minds and she did not want to talk about it. The rebellious blood of her mother stirred in her veins as she went on alone.

Jones was not in sight, and Joanna, heavy-hearted, emotionally exhausted, was glad that they need not meet. She had plenty of time to dress and walk down to the six o'clock train. She left a note for Jones and slipped out to take the path that led down through the birches. And so she came upon him.

He did not see her. He was on his knees tending a fire burning in a circle of stones beside the brook. A pot was already steaming over the flame, the grill was heating. A rug spread

on the ground and a pile of cushions awaited his guest. Summer lay still and golden about the little camp. The boyish profile, bent over the flame, looked touchingly sad, but there was a patient sweetness about it, a devout need to serve, that clutched at Joanna's throat and set her heart to pounding in her side.

After all, what was she so unhappy about! Other people? Here was love, the love almost too good to be hoped for, with a lover who took his happiness just as she did hers. They would hurt each other, yes; but oh, the good times they would have, not playing each other's game for kindness' sake, but both utterly content in the same pursuit! Rosalind was on the outside, she could not know. She



saw things in relation to backgrounds, but Jones, like Joanna, moved a solitary individual across uncharted space. They needed only each other. She had found immortal joy, and in her mortal blindness she was running away from it. Joanna stole back to the house unseen and changed to country clothes. A later train would satisfy propriety; she meant to have three hours of love first. There was no self-consciousness, no fear in her heart when she went down the path again; only a driving desire to give Jones his share of their great gift.

It was not easy. Jones was braced to bear sorrow well, and saw her shining advance with a sharp intake of the breath, a quick averting of his

unhappy eyes. She dropped down among his cushions and tried to let her message reach him without words. The breath of the crushed bracken under her rug, the murmur of the brook at her feet, would carry it to him better than speech could.

And presently he straightened up from his fire, turning to her as though summoned. "Joanna," he began. A deep smile answered, a look so vivid that he came impetuously to stand before her. "I'm glad you are happy," he jerked out. "I am so very glad."

"But I am not happy yet, Jonsey."

"You are going to be. Any one can see it."

"How?" she asked, keeping her eyes on his.

He could not read them. One idea had full possession of his single-track mind.

"In the good old way," he said courageously. "Now shall I put the steak on?"

"No," said Joanna.

"Too early?"

She would not say. As he spread and cut the bread her eyes followed him with smoldering purpose. She had been brought up on her mother's writings, which had never missed a chance to claim defiantly for woman equal right to utter the fateful words. It was the simple fine thing to do. Only her mother had not told how it caught at one's breath. She had to plunge.

"Jones," she said breathlessly, "do you love me?"

His face flamed and paled and the bread knife, dropping on pine needles, had to be washed off in the brook. He wiped it on a bit of paper before he spoke.

"It need not make you unhappy, dear," he said, and went on cutting bread and butter.

Joanna turned limp and wondered how her mother would meet that. In a moment it would be too late; Jones was unwrapping the steak, an eye to his glowing coals. If he put it on, everything would have to wait until after supper, when there would be so little time. He had adjusted the grill, was lifting the meat. With it hung from his fork, he turned to her to ask, "Now?"

"Jonsey!" she cried indignantly.

"You're such a stupid idiot! You won't see!"

He did see then. Some old instinct not mentioned in her mother's books had thrust her face down into a cushion, but she heard his start, then felt his arm about her shoulders.

"But I saw you with him—I watched you—I had never seen you like that," he stammered, afraid to believe even with his cheek pressed against hers, holding her to him as though he had just snatched her back from death.

"You saw me with Curtis Webb," she murmured.

Later, when a fresh fire of coals had been made and their supper smoked before them, Joanna answered the insistent question.

## THE MATE

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“Oh, yes, the chief would be suitable and all that; what they call a good match,” she admitted. “But, dearest, he is all finished—there is nothing you can do about him. When I bought a house I didn’t want one that was fine and perfect and gave me no occupation but to sit and read. I wanted one that I could work over, do things to for years and years, have inspirations about. Well, that is perhaps one reason why I would rather have you. You need a lot of rebuilding, Jonsey!”

He was not alarmed. “You will let the sun in,” he said in utter content.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEST

IF ANY one is interested to know just what Joanna did to her house, these before and after plans will show. Every good American has met this type of house, small and brown, with its long, sharp gables and the hanging wooden lacework. Some one has said that the fashion came straight from the pages of Sir Walter Scott and expressed the awakening of romance. We had had the restrained Colonial and the white classic with the fluted columns; then came this new feeling for knights and castles, and for the first time houses were

painted brown and shaped for a delicious gloom. Gothic arches found expression in pointed gables and Gothic traceries in stone were innocently reproduced in Hamburg edgings of American pine. Joanna's classification of it as the "cozy Gothic" was fairly accurate. Looked on from above, the roof approximated a cross.

Only a sun-lover will appreciate all that Joanna did. People who are content to live in porch-shaded rooms, cavernously dark on rainy afternoons, at the best filled with an ugly light from which all the radiance has been cut out, will assert that in summer the verandas are all that matter, anyway; but in these latitudes that is never true. As the plan



shows, in the original house the long dreary strip of parlor had its narrow end to the east; two equally dreary strips of flat-roofed porch cut off its side light and the south sun from the hall. The dining-room had veranda roof over its east window and to the west was a thicket of evergreen concealing the clothes yard; its only direct light came from the inhospitable north. Kitchen and servant's room absorbed the south side.

Up-stairs things were even worse. The sharp slant of the roof cut off all windows except those in the gable openings, and the stupid stairs took the breadth from the main bedroom. Joanna's best inspiration had been the abolition of the front stairs as such and the removal of them to the back of the house, where they were

merely a convenience, mounting between walls. The old front hall, down-stairs, became a gallery, largely glass to the south and east, entered from an open terrace, and all that pleasantness was let into what had been the sitting-room, but was now the dining-room. From the gallery, and also directly from the terrace by broad glass doors, one enters the new living-room. There is always sun there, east, south, west. On either side of the fireplace is a broad arch, the left one leading to a veritable sun corner, the right to the veranda added on to the original plan. The kitchen is now on the north, but has a window to the east.

There would have had to be a down-stairs room for the hired man if Joanna had not solved that by marry-

ing him. When they put up the garage, it is to have an extra bedroom overhead—for *Windygoold* is selling magnificently; but Mr. Webb will probably use that for a study, hiring such occasional outside labor as they need, for he and Joanna are both passionate diggers and hammerers as well as rebels against the problems of employment. They cooked their own wedding supper down by the brook, and carried out their camping experiment with brilliant success. It is only fair to add that Mrs. Messenger considered it dismal.

Up-stairs gables have been cut into all the sunny slants of the roof; baths have been multiplied, and over the new veranda is a sleeping porch.

## THE NEST

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Both of the big bedrooms have fireplaces, and the new kitchen chimney gives a stove-hole for the smaller room, which will be the housekeeper's when in time they have to replace Mrs. Roberts. Closets and cupboards are tucked in everywhere; they used to wake Joanna up in the night, suggesting themselves. Every room now has the breadth that is indispensable to charm, but the house is on a small scale, so that a day of Mrs. Haggerty leaves it shining from top to bottom. With the book a success, Rosalind has relented to Jones, and sometimes even drags them forth to be "met"; but the joy with which they run home to the nest!

THE END

















